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"THERE NEVER WAS ANY MOUSE HERE." [*Page* 129.

THE MOUSE-TRAP

AND OTHER FARCES

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF

"APRIL HOPES" "ANNIE KILBURN" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

26619

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1909

6585/52

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Garroters	1
Five-o'Clock Tea	43
The Mouse-trap	77
A Likely Story	107

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"THERE NEVER WAS ANY MOUSE HERE" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"WHY, EDWARD, WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE MATTER?" *Facing p.* 4

"I'VE JUST BEEN ROBBED!" . . . . . " 18

SHE LOOKS FONDLY UP INTO THE FACE OF HER HUSBAND FOR APPROVAL . . . . . " 30

"WILL YOU ANSWER MY QUESTION, AMY?" . . . . " 60

MRS. SOMERS, POURING A CUP OF TEA: "THAT MAKES IT A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULT" . . . . . " 64

"WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?" . . . . . " 88

"THE MOST EXCITING PART" . . . . . " 110

THE GARROTERS

THE GARROTERS

Part First

I

MRS. ROBERTS; then MR. ROBERTS

At the window of her apartment in Hotel Bellingham, Mrs. Roberts stands looking out into the early nightfall. A heavy snow is driving without, and from time to time the rush of the wind and the sweep of the flakes against the panes are heard. At the sound of hurried steps in the anteroom, Mrs. Roberts turns from the window and runs to the portière, through which she puts her head.

Mrs. Roberts: "Is that you, Edward? So dark here! We ought really to keep the gas turned up all the time."

Mr. Roberts, in a muffled voice, from without: "Yes, it's I."

Mrs. Roberts: "Well, hurry in to the fire, do! Ugh, what a storm! Do you suppose anybody will come? You must be half frozen, you poor thing! Come quick, or you'll certainly perish!" She flies from the portière to the fire burning on the hearth, pokes it, flings on a log, jumps back, brushes from her dress with a light shriek the sparks driven out upon it, and continues talk-

ing incessantly in a voice lifted for her husband to hear in the anteroom. "If I'd dreamed it was any such storm as this, I should never have let you go out in it in the world. It wasn't at all necessary to have the flowers. I could have got on perfectly well, and I believe *now* the table would look better without them. The chrysanthemums would have been quite enough; and I know you've taken more cold. I could tell it by your voice as soon as you spoke; and just as quick as they're gone to-night I'm going to have you bathe your feet in mustard and hot water, and take eight of aconite, and go straight to bed. And I don't want you to eat very much at dinner, dear, and you must be sure not to drink any coffee, or the aconite won't be of the least use." She turns and encounters her husband, who enters through the portière, his face pale, his eyes wild, his white necktie pulled out of knot, and his shirt-front rumpled. "Why, Edward, what in the world is the matter? What has happened?"

Roberts, sinking into a chair: "Get me a glass of water, Agnes—wine—whiskey—brandy—"

Mrs. Roberts, bustling wildly about: "Yes, yes. But what— Bella! Bridget! Maggy!—Oh, I'll go for it myself, and I *won't* stop to listen! Only—only don't die!" While Roberts remains with his eyes shut, and his head sunk on his breast in token of extreme exhaustion, she disappears and reappears through the door leading to her chamber, and then through the portière cutting off the dining-room. She finally descends upon her husband with a flagon of cologne in one hand, a small decanter of brandy in the other, and a wine-glass held in the hollow of her arm against her breast. She contrives to set the glass down on the mantel and fill it from the flagon; then she turns with the decanter in her hand, and while she presses the glass to her husband's

"WHY, EDWARD, WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE MATTER?"

lips begins to pour the brandy on his head. "Here! this will revive you, and it 'll refresh you to have this cologne on your head."

Roberts, rejecting a mouthful of the cologne with a furious sputter and springing to his feet: "Why, you've given me the cologne to *drink,* Agnes! What are you about? Do you want to poison me? Isn't it enough to be robbed at six o'clock on the Common without having your head soaked in brandy and your whole system scented up like a barber's shop when you get home?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Robbed?" She drops the wine-glass, puts the decanter down on the hearth, and, carefully bestowing the flagon of cologne in the wood-box, abandons herself to justice. "Then let them come for me at once, Edward! If I could have the heart to send you out in such a night as this for a few wretched rosebuds, I'm quite equal to poisoning you. Oh, Edward, *who* robbed you?"

Roberts: "That's what I don't know." He continues to wipe his head with his handkerchief and to sputter a little from time to time. "All I know is that when I got—phew!—to that dark spot by the Frog Pond, just by—phew!—that little group of—phew!—evergreens, you know—phew!—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, yes; go on! I can bear it, Edward."

Roberts: "—a man brushed heavily against me, and then hurried on in the other direction. I had unbuttoned my coat to look at my watch under the lamp-post, and after he struck against me I clapped my hand to my waistcoat and—phew!—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Waistcoat! Yes!"

Roberts: "—found my watch gone."

Mrs. Roberts: "What! Your watch? The watch

Willis gave you? Made out of the gold that he mined himself when he first went out to California? Don't ask me to believe it, Edward! But I'm only too glad that you escaped with your life. Let them have the watch and welcome. Oh, my dear, dear husband!" She approaches him with extended arms, and then suddenly arrests herself. "But you've got it on!"

Roberts, with as much returning dignity as can comport with his dishevelled appearance: "Yes; I took it from him." At his wife's speechless astonishment: "I went after him and took it from him." He sits down and continues, with resolute calm, while his wife remains standing before him motionless: "Agnes, I don't know how I came to do it. I wouldn't have believed I could do it. I've never thought that I had much courage—physical courage; but when I felt my watch was gone a sort of frenzy came over me. I wasn't hurt; and for the first time in my life I realized what an abominable outrage theft was. The thought that at six o'clock in the evening, in the very heart of a great city like Boston, an inoffensive citizen could be assaulted and robbed made me furious. I didn't call out. I simply buttoned my coat tight round me and turned and ran after the fellow."

Mrs. Roberts: "Edward!"

Roberts: "Yes, I did. He hadn't got half a dozen rods away—it all took place in a flash—and I could easily run him down. He was considerably larger than I—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh!"

Roberts: "—and he looked young and very athletic; but these things didn't seem to make any impression on me."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, I wonder that you live to tell the tale, Edward!"

Roberts: "Well, I wonder a little at myself. I don't set up for a great deal of—"

Mrs. Roberts: "But I always knew you had it! Go on. Oh, when I tell Willis of this! Had the robber any accomplices? Were there many of them?"

Roberts: "I only saw one. And I saw that my only chance was to take him at a disadvantage. I sprang upon him, and pulled him over on his back. I merely said, 'I'll trouble you for that watch of mine, if you please,' jerked open his coat, snatched the watch from his pocket—I broke the chain, I see—and then left him and ran again. He didn't make the slightest resistance nor utter a word. Of course it wouldn't do for him to make any noise about it, and I dare say he was glad to get off so easily." With affected nonchalance: "I'm pretty badly rumpled, I see. He fell against me, and a scuffle like that doesn't improve one's appearance."

Mrs. Roberts, very solemnly: "Edward! I don't know what to say! Of course it makes my blood run cold to realize what you have been through, and to think what might have happened; but I think you behaved splendidly. Why, I never heard of such perfect heroism! You needn't tell *me* that he made no resistance. There was a deadly struggle—your necktie and everything about you shows it. And you needn't think there was only one of them—"

Roberts, modestly: "I don't believe there was more."

Mrs. Roberts: "Nonsense! There are *always* two! I've read the accounts of those garrotings. And to think you not only got out of their clutches alive, but got your property back—Willis' watch! Oh, what *will* Willis say? But I know how proud of you he'll be. Oh, I wish I could scream it from the house-tops. Why didn't you call the police?"

Roberts: "I didn't think—I hadn't time to think."

Mrs. Roberts: "No matter. I'm glad you have *all* the glory of it. I don't believe you half realize what you've been through now. And perhaps this was the robbers' first attempt, and it will be a lesson to them. Oh yes! I'm glad you let them escape, Edward. They may have families. If every one behaved as you've done there would soon be an end of garroting. But, oh! I can't bear to think of the danger you've run. And I want you to promise me never, never to undertake such a thing again!"

Roberts: "Well, I don't know—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, yes; you must! Suppose you had got killed in that awful struggle with those reckless wretches tugging to get away from you! Think of the children! Why, you might have burst a blood-vessel! Will you promise, Edward? Promise this instant, on your bended knees, just as if you were in a court of justice!" Mrs. Roberts' excitement mounts, and she flings herself at her husband's feet and pulls his face down to hers with the arm she has thrown about his neck. "Will you promise?"

II

MRS. CRASHAW; MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS.

Mrs. Crashaw, entering unobserved: "Promise you what, Agnes? The man doesn't smoke *now.* What more can you ask?" She starts back from the spectacle of Roberts' disordered dress. "Why, what's happened to you, Edward?"

Mrs. Roberts, springing to her feet: "Oh, you may well ask that, Aunt Mary! Happened? You ought to fall down and worship him! And you *will* when you know what he's been through. He's been robbed!"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Robbed? What nonsense! Who robbed him? *Where* was he robbed?"

Mrs. Roberts: "He was attacked by two garroters—"

Roberts: "No, no—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't speak, Edward! I *know* there were two. On the Common. Not half an hour ago. As he was going to get me some rosebuds. In the midst of this terrible storm."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Is this true, Edward?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't answer, Edward! One of the band threw his arm round Edward's neck—so." She illustrates by garroting Mrs. Crashaw, who disengages herself with difficulty.

Mrs. Crashaw: "Mercy, child! What *are* you doing to my lace?"

Mrs. Roberts: "And the other one snatched his watch and ran as fast as he could."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Willis' watch? Why, he's got it on!"

Mrs. Roberts, with proud delight: "Exactly what I said when he told me." Then, very solemnly: "And do you know *why* he's got it on?—'Sh, Edward! I *will* tell! Because he ran after them and took it back again."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Why, they might have killed him!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Of *course* they might. But *Edward* didn't care. The idea of being robbed at six o'clock on the Common made him so furious that he scorned to cry out for help, or call the police, or anything; but he just ran after them—"

Roberts: "Agnes! Agnes! There was only *one.*"

Mrs. Roberts: "Nonsense, Edward! How could you tell, so excited as you were?—And caught hold of the largest of the wretches—a perfect young giant—"

Roberts: "No, no; not a *giant,* my dear."

Mrs. Roberts: "Well, he was *young, any*way!—And flung him on the ground." She advances upon Mrs. Crashaw in her enthusiasm.

Mrs. Crashaw: "Don't you fling *me* on the ground, Agnes! I won't have it."

Mrs. Roberts: "And tore his coat open, while all the rest were tugging at him, and snatched his watch, and then—and then just walked coolly away."

Roberts: "No, my dear; I ran as fast as I could."

Mrs. Roberts: "Well, *ran.* It's quite the same thing, and I'm just as proud of you as if you had walked. Of course you were not going to throw your life away."

Mrs. Crashaw: "I think he did a very silly thing in going after them at all."

Roberts: "Why, of course, if I'd thought twice about it, I shouldn't have done it."

Mrs. Roberts: "Of course you wouldn't, dear! And

that's what I want him to promise, Aunt Mary: never to do it again, no matter *how* much he's provoked. I want him to promise it right here in your presence, Aunt Mary!"

Mrs. Crashaw: "I think it's much more important he should put on another collar and—shirt, if he's going to see company."

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes; go right off at once, Edward. How you *do* think of things, Aunt Mary! I really suppose I should have gone on all night and never noticed his looks. Run, Edward, and do it, dear. But—kiss me first! Oh, it *don't* seem as if you could be alive and well after it all! Are you sure you're not hurt?"

Roberts, embracing her: "No; I'm all right."

Mrs. Roberts: "And you're not injured internally? Sometimes they're injured internally—aren't they, Aunt Mary?—and it doesn't show till months afterward. Are you sure?"

Roberts, making a cursory examination of his ribs with his hands: "Yes, I think so."

Mrs. Roberts: "And you don't feel any bad effects from the cologne *now?* Just think, Aunt Mary, I gave him cologne to drink, and poured the brandy on his head when he came in! But I was determined to keep calm, whatever I did. And if I've poisoned him I'm quite willing to die for it—oh, quite! I would gladly take the blame of it before the whole world."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Well, for pity's sake, let the man go and make himself decent. There's your bell now."

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, do go, Edward. But — kiss me—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "He *did* kiss you, Agnes. Don't be a simpleton!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Did he? Well, kiss me again, then,

Edward. And now do go, dear. M-m-m-m." The inarticulate endearments represented by these signs terminate in a wild embrace, protracted half-way across the room, in the height of which Mr. Willis Campbell enters.

III

MR. CAMPBELL, MRS. CRASHAW, MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS

Willis, pausing in contemplation: "Hello! What's the matter? What's she trying to get out of you, Roberts? Don't you do it, anyway, old fellow."

Mrs. Roberts, in as ecstasy of satisfaction: "Willis! Oh, you've come in time to see him just as he is. Look at him, Willis!" In the excess of her emotion she twitches her husband about, and with his arm fast in her clutch presents him in the disadvantageous effect of having just been taken into custody. Under these circumstances Roberts' attempt at an expression of diffident heroism fails; he looks sneaking, he looks guilty, and his eyes fall under the astonished regard of his brother-in-law.

Willis: "What's the matter with him? What's he been doing?"

Mrs. Roberts: "'Sh, Edward!—What's he been doing? What does he look as if he had been doing?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Agnes—"

Willis: "He looks as if he had been signing the pledge. And he—smells like it."

Mrs. Roberts: "For shame, Willis! I should think you'd sink through the floor. Edward, not a word! I *am* ashamed of him, if he *is* my brother."

Willis: "Why, what in the world's up, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Up? He's been *robbed!*—robbed

on the Common not five minutes ago! A whole gang of garroters surrounded him under the Old Elm—or just where it used to be—and took his watch away! And he ran after them, and knocked the largest of the gang down, and took it back again. He wasn't hurt, but we're afraid he's been injured internally; he may be bleeding internally *now*— Oh, do you think he is, Willis? Don't you think we ought to send for a physician?— That, and the cologne I gave him to drink. It's the brandy I poured on his head makes him smell so. And he all so exhausted he couldn't speak, and I didn't know what I was doing, either; but he's promised— oh yes, he's promised!—never, never to do it again." She again flings her arms about her husband, and then turns proudly to her brother.

Willis: "Do you know what it means, Aunt Mary?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Not in the least! But I've no doubt Edward can explain, after he's changed his linen—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh yes, do go, Edward! Not but what I should be proud and happy to have you appear just as you are before the whole world, if it was only to put Willis down with his jokes about your absent-mindedness, and his boasts about those California desperadoes of his."

Roberts: "Come, come, Agnes! I *must* protest against your—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, I know it doesn't become me to praise your courage, darling! But I should like to know what Willis would have done, with all his California experience, if a garroter had taken his watch?"

Willis: "I should have let him keep it, and pay five dollars a quarter himself for getting it cleaned and spoiled. Anybody but a literary man would. How many of them were there, Roberts?"

Roberts: "I only saw one."

Mrs. Roberts: "But of course there were more. How could he tell in the dark and excitement? And the one he did see was a perfect giant; so you can imagine what the rest must have been like."

Willis: "Did you really knock him down?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Knock him down? Of course he did."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Agnes, *will* you hold your tongue and let the men alone?"

Mrs. Roberts, whimpering: "I can't, Aunt Mary. And you couldn't if it was yours."

Roberts: "I pulled him over backward."

Mrs. Roberts: "There, Willis!"

Willis: "And grabbed your watch from him?"

Roberts: "I was in quite a frenzy; I really hardly knew what I was doing—"

Mrs. Roberts: "And he didn't call for the police, or anything—"

Willis: "Ah, that showed presence of mind! He knew it wouldn't have been any use."

Mrs. Roberts: "And when he had got his watch away from them he just let them go because they had families dependent on them."

Willis: "I should have let them go in the first place; but you behaved handsomely in the end, Roberts; there's no denying that. And when you came in she gave you cologne to drink, and poured brandy on your head. It must have revived you. I should think it would wake the dead."

Mrs. Roberts: "I was all excitement, Willis—"

Willis: "No, I should think from the fact that you had set the decanter here on the hearth, and put your cologne into the wood-box, you were perfectly calm, Agnes." He takes them up and hands them to her. "Quite as calm as usual." The door-bell rings.

Mrs. Crashaw: "Willis, *will* you let that ridiculous man go away and make himself presentable before people begin to come?" The bell rings violently, peal upon peal.

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, my goodness, what's that? It's the garroters—I know it is; and we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

Mrs. Crashaw: "What in the world can it—"

Willis: "Why don't your girl answer the bell, Agnes? Or I'll go myself." The bell rings violently again.

Mrs. Roberts: "*No,* Willis, you sha'n't! Don't leave me, Edward! Aunt Mary!—Oh, if we *must* die, let us all die together! Oh, my poor children! Ugh! What's that?" The servant-maid opens the outer door, and uttering a shriek rushes in through the drawing-room portière.

Bella, the Maid: "Oh, my goodness! Mrs. Roberts, it's Mr. Bemis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Which Mr. Bemis?"

Roberts: "What's the matter with him?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Why doesn't she show him in?"

Willis: "Has *he* been garroting somebody, too?"

IV

MR. BEMIS, MR. CAMPBELL, MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS

Bemis, appearing through the portière: "I—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Roberts. I oughtn't to present myself in this state—I— But I thought I'd better stop on my way home and report, so that my son needn't be alarmed at my absence when he comes. I—" He stops, exhausted, and regards the others with a wild stare, while they stand taking note of his disordered coat, his torn vest, and his tumbled hat. "I've just been robbed—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Robbed? Why, *Edward* has been robbed, too."

Bemis: "—coming through the Common—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, *Edward* was coming through the Common."

Bemis: "—of my watch—"

Mrs. Roberts, in rapturous admiration of the coincidence: "Oh, and it was Edward's *watch* they took!"

Willis: "It's a parallel case, Agnes. Pour him out a glass of cologne to drink, and rub his head with brandy. And you might let him sit down and rest while you're enjoying the excitement."

Mrs. Roberts, in hospitable remorse: "Oh, what am I thinking of! Here, Edward—or no, you're too weak, you mustn't. Willis, *you* help me to help him to the sofa."

Mrs. Crashaw: "I think you'd better help him off with his overcoat and his arctics." To the maid: "Here, Bella, if you haven't quite taken leave of your wits, undo his shoes."

Roberts: "*I'll* help him off with his coat—"

Bemis: "Careful! careful! I may be injured internally."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, if you only *were,* Mr. Bemis, perhaps I could persuade Edward that he was, too: I *know* he is. Edward, don't exert yourself! Aunt Mary, will you *stop* him, or do you all wish to see me go distracted here before your eyes?"

Willis, examining the overcoat which Roberts has removed: "Well, you won't have much trouble buttoning and unbuttoning this coat for the present."

Bemis: "They tore it open, and tore my watch from my vest-pocket—"

Willis, looking at the vest: "I see. Pretty lively work. Were there many of them?"

Bemis: "There must have been two, at least—"

Mrs. Roberts: "There were half a dozen in the gang that attacked Edward."

Bemis: "One of them pulled me violently over on my back—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Edward's put *his* arm round his neck and choked him."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Agnes!"

Mrs. Roberts: "I *know* he did, Aunt Mary."

Bemis: "And the other tore my watch out of my pocket."

Mrs. Roberts: "*Edward's*—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Agnes, I'm thoroughly ashamed of you. *Will* you stop interrupting?"

Bemis: "And left me lying in the snow."

Mrs. Roberts: "And then he ran after them, and

"I'VE JUST BEEN ROBBED!"

snatched his watch away again in spite of them all; and he didn't call for the police, or anything, because it was their first offence, and he couldn't bear to think of their suffering families."

Bemis, with a stare of profound astonishment: "Who?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Edward. Didn't I *say* Edward all the time?"

Bemis: "I thought you meant me. I didn't think of pursuing them; but you may be very sure that if there had been a policeman within call—of course there wasn't one within cannon-shot—I should have handed the scoundrels over without the slightest remorse."

Roberts: "Oh!" He sinks into a chair with a slight groan.

Willis: "What is it?"

Roberts: "'Sh! Don't say anything. But — stay here. I want to speak with you, Willis."

Bemis, with mounting wrath: "I should not have hesitated an instant to give the rascal in charge, no matter *who* was dependent upon him—no matter if he were my dearest friend, my own brother."

Roberts, under his breath: "Gracious powers!"

Bemis: "And while I am very sorry to disagree with Mr. Roberts, I can't help feeling that he made a great mistake in allowing the ruffians to escape."

Mrs. Crashaw, with severity: "I think you are quite right, Mr. Bemis."

Bemis: "Probably it was the same gang attacked us both. After escaping from Mr. Roberts they fell upon me."

Mrs. Crashaw: "I haven't a doubt of it."

Roberts, sotto voce to his brother-in-law: "I think I'll ask you to go with me to my room, Willis. Don't alarm Agnes, please. I—I feel quite faint."

Mrs. Roberts, crestfallen: "I can't feel that Edward was to blame. Ed— Oh, I suppose he's gone off to make himself presentable. But Willis— Where's Willis, Aunt Mary?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Probably gone with him to help him."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, he *saw* how unstrung poor Edward was! Mr. Bemis, I think you're quite prejudiced. How could Edward help their escaping? I think it was quite enough for him, single-handed, to get his watch back." A ring at the door, and then a number of voices in the anteroom. "I do believe they're all there! I'll just run out and prepare your son. He would be dreadfully shocked if he came right in upon you." She runs into the anteroom and is heard without: "Oh, Doctor Lawton! Oh, Lou dear! *Oh,* Mr. Bemis! How can I ever tell you? Your poor father! No, no, I *can't* tell you! You mustn't ask me! It's too hideous! And you wouldn't believe me if I did."

Chorus of anguished voices: "What? what? what?"

Mrs. Roberts: "They've been robbed! Garroted on the Common! And *oh,* Doctor Lawton, I'm so glad *you've* come! They're both injured internally, but I *wish* you'd look at Edward first."

Bemis: "Good Heavens! Is that Mrs. Roberts' idea of preparing my son? And his poor young wife!" He addresses his demand to Mrs. Crashaw, who lifts the hands of impotent despair.

Part Second

MR. ROBERTS; MR. CAMPBELL

In Mr. Roberts' dressing-room that gentleman is discovered tragically confronting Mr. Willis Campbell with a watch uplifted in either hand.

Willis: "Well?"

Roberts, gasping: "My—my watch!"

Willis: "Yes. How comes there to be two of it?"

Roberts: "Don't you understand? When I went out I—didn't take my watch—with me. I left it here on my bureau."

Willis: "Well?"

Roberts: "Oh, merciful Heavens! Don't you see? Then I couldn't have been robbed!"

Willis: "Well, but whose watch did you take from the fellow that didn't rob you, then?"

Roberts: "His own!" He abandons himself powerlessly upon a chair. "Yes; I left my own watch here, and when that person brushed against me in the Common, I missed it for the first time. I supposed he had robbed me and ran after him, and—"

Willis: "Robbed *him!*"

Roberts: "Yes."

Willis: "Ah, ha, ha, ha! I, hi, hi, hi. O, ho, ho, ho!" He yields to a series of these gusts and paroxysms, bowing up and down and stamping to and fro, and finally sits down exhausted and wipes the tears from his cheeks. "Really, this thing will kill me. What are you going to do about it, Roberts?"

Roberts, with profound dejection and abysmal solemnity: "I don't know, Willis. Don't you see that it must have been—that I must have robbed—Mr. Bemis?"

Willis: "Bemis!" After a moment for tasting the fact. "Why, so it was! Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! And was poor old Bemis that burly ruffian? that bloodthirsty gang of giants? that — that — oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" He bows his head upon his chair-back in complete exhaustion, demanding, feebly, as he gets breath for the successive questions: "What are you going to d-o-o-o? What shall you s-a-a-a-y? How can you expla-a-ain it?"

Roberts: "I can do nothing. I can say nothing. I can never explain it. I must go to Mr. Bemis and make a clean breast of it; but think of the absurdity—the ridicule!"

Willis, after a thoughtful silence: "Oh, it isn't *that* you've got to think of. You've got to think of the old gentleman's sense of injury and outrage. Didn't you hear what he said—that he would have handed over his dearest friend, his own brother, to the police?"

Roberts: "But that was in the supposition that his dearest friend, his own brother, had intentionally robbed him. You can't imagine, Willis—"

Willis: "Oh, I can imagine a great many things. It's all well enough for you to say that the robbery was a mistake; but it was a genuine case of garroting, as far as the assault and taking the watch go. He's a very pudgicky old gentleman."

Roberts: "He is."

Willis: "And I don't see how you're going to satisfy him that it was all a joke. Joke? It *wasn't* a joke! It was a real assault and a bona fide robbery, and Bemis can prove it."

Roberts: "But he would never insist—"

Willis: "Oh, I don't know about that. He's pretty queer, Bemis is. You can't say what an old gentleman like that will or won't do. If he should choose to carry it into court—"

Roberts: "Court!"

Willis: "—it might be embarrassing. And, anyway, it would have a very strange look in the papers."

Roberts: "The papers! Good gracious!"

Willis: "Ten years from now a man that heard you mentioned would forget all about the acquittal and say: 'Roberts? Oh yes! Wasn't he the one they sent to the House of Correction for garroting an old friend of his on the Common?' You see, it wouldn't do to go and make a clean breast of it to Bemis."

Roberts: "I see."

Willis: "What will you do?"

Roberts: "I must never say anything to him about it. Just let it go."

Willis: "And keep his watch? I don't see how you could manage that. What would you do with the watch? You might sell it, of course—"

Roberts: "Oh no, I *couldn't* do that."

Willis: "You might give it away to some deserving person; but if it got him into trouble—"

Roberts: "No, no; that wouldn't do, either."

Willis: "And you can't have it lying around; Agnes would be sure to find it, sooner or later."

Roberts: "Yes."

Willis: "Besides, there's your conscience. Your conscience wouldn't *let* you keep Bemis' watch away from him. And if it would, what do you suppose Agnes' conscience would do when she came to find it out? Agnes hasn't got much of a head—the want of it seems to grow upon her; but she's got a conscience as big as the side of a house."

Roberts: "Oh, I see; I see."

Willis, coming up and standing over him, with his hands in his pockets: "I tell you what, Roberts, you're in a box."

Roberts, abjectly: "I know it, Willis; I know it. What do you suggest? You *must* know some way out of it."

Willis: "It isn't a simple matter like telling them to start the elevator down when they couldn't start her up. I've got to think it over." He walks to and fro, Roberts' eyes helplessly following his movements. "How would it do to— No, that wouldn't do, either."

Roberts: "What wouldn't?"

Willis: "Nothing. I was just thinking— I say, you might— Or, no, you couldn't."

Roberts: "Couldn't what?"

Willis: "Nothing. But if you were to— No; up a stump that way, too."

Roberts: "Which way? For mercy's sake, my dear fellow, don't seem to get a clew if you haven't it. It's more than I can bear." He rises, and desperately confronts Willis in his promenade. "If you see any hope at all—"

Willis, stopping: "Why, if you were a different sort of fellow, Roberts, the thing would be perfectly easy."

Roberts: "Very well, then. What sort of fellow do you want me to be? I'll be any sort of fellow you like."

Willis: "Oh, but you couldn't! With that face of yours, and that confounded conscience of yours behind it, you would give away the whitest lie that was ever told."

Roberts: "Do you wish me to lie? Very well, then, I will lie. What is the lie?"

Willis: "Ah, now you're talking like a man! I can

soon think up a lie, if you're game for it. Suppose it wasn't so very white—say a delicate blond!"

Roberts: "I shouldn't care if it were as black as the ace of spades."

Willis: "Roberts, I honor you! It isn't everybody who could steal an old gentleman's watch and then be so ready to lie out of it. Well, you *have* got courage —both kinds—moral and physical."

Roberts: "Thank you, Willis. Of course I don't pretend that I should be willing to lie under ordinary circumstances; but for the sake of Agnes and the children— I don't want any awkwardness about the matter; it would be the death of me. Well, what do you wish me to say? Be quick; I don't believe I could hold out for a great while. I don't suppose but what Mr. Bemis would be reasonable, even if I—"

Willis: "I'm afraid we couldn't trust him. The only way is for you to take the bull by the horns."

Roberts: "Yes?"

Willis: "You will not only have to lie, Roberts, but you will have to wear an air of innocent candor at the same time."

Roberts: "I — I'm afraid I couldn't manage that. What is your idea?"

Willis: "Oh, just come into the room with a laugh when we go back, and say, in an off-hand way, 'By-the-way, Agnes, Willis and I made a remarkable discovery in my dressing-room; we found my watch there on the bureau. Ha, ha, ha!' Do you think you could do it?"

Roberts: "I—I don't know."

Willis: "Try the laugh now."

Roberts: "I'd rather not—now."

Willis: "Well, try it, anyway."

Roberts: "Ha, ha, ha!"

Willis: "Once more."

Roberts: "Ha, ha, ha!"

Willis: "Pretty ghastly; but I guess you can come it."

Roberts: "I'll try. And then what?"

Willis: "And then you say, 'I hadn't put it on when I went out, and when I got after that fellow and took it back I was simply getting somebody else's watch!' Then you hold out both watches to her and laugh again. Everybody laughs and crowds round you to examine the watches, and you make fun and crack jokes at your own expense all the time, and pretty soon old Bemis says, 'Why, this is *my* watch *now!*' and you laugh more than ever—"

Roberts: "I'm afraid I couldn't laugh when he said that. I don't believe I could laugh. It would make my blood run cold."

Willis: "Oh no, it wouldn't. You'd be in the spirit of it by that time."

Roberts: "Do you think so? Well?"

Willis: "And then you say, 'Well, this is the most remarkable coincidence I ever heard of. I didn't get my own watch from the fellow, but I got yours, Mr. Bemis'; and then you hand it over to him and say, 'Sorry I had to break the chain in getting it from him,' and then everybody laughs again and—and that ends it."

Roberts, with a profound sigh: "Do you think that would end it?"

Willis: "Why, certainly. It'll put old Bemis in the wrong, don't you see? It'll show that instead of letting the fellow escape to go and rob *him,* you attacked him and took Bemis' property back from him yourself. Bemis wouldn't have a word to say. All you've got to do is to keep up a light, confident manner."

Roberts: "But what if it shouldn't put Bemis in the

wrong? What if he shouldn't say or do anything that we've counted upon, but something altogether different?"

Willis: "Well, then, you must trust to inspiration, and adapt yourself to circumstances."

Roberts: "Wouldn't it be rather more of a joke to come out with the facts at once?"

Willis: "On you it would; and a year from now—say next Christmas—you could get the laugh on Bemis that way. But if you were to risk it now, there's no telling how he'd take it. He's so indignant he might insist upon leaving the house. But with this plan of mine—"

Roberts, in despair: "I couldn't, Willis. I don't feel light, and I don't feel confident, and I couldn't act it. If it were a simple lie—"

Willis: "Oh, lies are never simple; they require the exercise of all your ingenuity. If you want something simple you must stick to the truth and throw yourself on Bemis' mercy."

Roberts, walking up and down in great distress: "I can't do it; I can't do it. It's very kind of you to think it all out for me, but"—struck by a sudden idea—"Willis, why shouldn't *you* do it?"

Willis: "I?"

Roberts: "You are good at those things. You have so much aplomb, you know. *You* could carry it off, you know, first-rate."

Willis, as if finding a certain fascination in the idea: "Well, I don't know—"

Roberts: "And I could chime in on the laugh. I think I could do that if somebody else was doing the rest."

Willis, after a moment of silent reflection: "I *should* like to do it. I should like to see how old Bemis would

look when I played it on him. Roberts, I *will* do it. Not a word! I should *like* to do it. Now you go on and hurry up your toilet, old fellow; you needn't mind me here. I'll be rehearsing."

Mrs. Roberts, knocking at the door outside: "Edward, are you *never* coming?"

Roberts: "Yes, yes; I'll be there in a minute, my dear."

Willis: "Yes, he'll be there. Run along back, and keep it going till we come. Roberts, I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for this chance."

Roberts: "I'm glad you like it."

Willis: "Like it? Of course I do. Or, no! Hold on! Wait! It won't do! No; you must take the leading part, and I'll support you, and I'll come in strong if you break down. That's the way we have got to work it. You must make the start."

Roberts: "Couldn't you make it better, Willis? It's your idea."

Willis: "No; they'd be sure to suspect me, and they can't suspect you of anything—you're so innocent. The illusion will be complete."

Roberts, very doubtfully: "Do you think so?"

Willis: "Yes. Hurry up. Let me unbutton that collar for you."

Part Third

I

MRS. ROBERTS, DOCTOR LAWTON, MRS. CRASHAW, MR. BEMIS, YOUNG MR. and MRS. BEMIS

Mrs. Roberts, surrounded by her guests, and confronting from her sofa Mr. Bemis, who still remains sunken in his arm-chair, has apparently closed an exhaustive recital of the events which have ended in his presence there. She looks round with a mixed air of self-denial and self-satisfaction to read the admiration of her listeners in their sympathetic countenances.

Doctor Lawton, with an ironical sigh of profound impression: "Well, Mrs. Roberts, you are certainly the most lavishly hospitable of hostesses. Every one knows what delightful dinners you give; but these little dramatic episodes which you offer your guests, by way of appetizer, are certainly unique. Last year an elevator stuck in the shaft with half the company in it, and this year a highway robbery, its daring punishment and its reckless repetition—what the newspapers will call 'A Triple Mystery' when it gets to them—and both victims among our commensals! Really, I don't know what more we could ask of you, unless it were the foot-padded footpad himself as a commensal. If this sort of thing should become de rigueur in society generally, I don't know what's to become of people who haven't your invention."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, it's all very well to make fun now, Doctor Lawton; but if you had been here when they first came in—"

Young Mrs. Bemis: "Yes, indeed, I think so, too, Mrs. Roberts. If Mr. Bemis—Alfred, I mean—and papa hadn't been with me when you came out there to prepare us, I don't know what I should have done. I should certainly have died, or gone through the floor." She looks fondly up into the face of her husband for approval, where he stands behind her chair and furitively gives him her hand for pressure.

Young Mr. Bemis: "Somebody ought to write to the Curwens—Mrs. Curwen, that is—about it."

Mrs. Bemis, taking away her hand: "Oh yes, papa, *do* write!"

Lawton: "I will, my dear. Even Mrs. Curwen, dazzling away in another sphere—hemisphere—and surrounded by cardinals and all the other celestial lights there at Rome, will be proud to exploit this new evidence of American enterprise. I can fancy the effect she will produce with it."

Mrs. Roberts: "And the Millers—what a shame they couldn't come! How excited they would have been!—that is, Mrs. Miller. Is their baby very bad, Doctor?"

Lawton: "Well, vaccination is always a very serious thing—with a first child. I should say, from the way Mrs. Miller feels about it, that Miller wouldn't be able to be out for a week to come yet."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, how ridiculous you are, Doctor!"

Bemis, rising feebly from his chair: "Well, now that it's all explained, Mrs. Roberts, I think I'd better go home; and if you'll kindly have them telephone for a carriage—"

Mrs. Roberts: "*No,* indeed, Mr. Bemis! We shall

SHE LOOKS FONDLY UP INTO THE FACE OF HER HUSBAND FOR APPROVAL.

not let you go. Why, the *idea!* You must stay and take dinner with us, just the same."

Bemis: "But in this state—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, never mind the *state.* You look perfectly well; and if you insist upon going I shall know that you bear a grudge against Edward for not arresting him. Wait! We can put you in perfect order in just a second." She flies out of the room, and then comes swooping back with a needle and thread, a fresh white necktie, a handkerchief, and a hair-brush. "There! I can't let you go to Edward's dressing-room, because he's there himself, and the children are in mine, and we've had to put the new maid in the guest-chamber—you *are* rather cramped in flats, that's true; that's the worst of them—but if you don't mind having your toilet made in public, like the King of France—"

Bemis, entering into the spirit of it: "Not the least; but—" He laughs and drops back into his chair.

Mrs. Roberts, distributing the brush to young Mr. Bemis, and the tie to his wife, and dropping upon her knees before Mr. Bemis: "Now, Mrs. Lou, you just whip off that crumpled tie and whip on the fresh one, and, *Mister* Lou, you give his hair a touch, and I'll have this torn button-hole mended before you can think." She seizes it and begins to sew vigorously upon it.

Mrs. Crashaw: "Agnes, you are the most ridiculously sensible woman in the country."

Lawton, standing before the group, with his arms folded and his feet well apart, in an attitude of easy admiration: "The Wounded Adonis, attended by the Loves and Graces. Familiar Pompeiian fresco."

Mrs. Roberts, looking around at him: "I don't see a great many Loves."

Lawton: "She ignores us, Mrs. Crashaw. And after what you've just said!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Then why don't you do something?"

Lawton: "The Loves *never* do anything—in frescos. They stand round and sympathize. Besides, we are waiting to administer an anæsthetic. But what I admire in this subject even more than the activity of the Graces is the serene dignity of the Adonis. I have seen my old friend in many trying positions, but I never realized till now all the simpering absurdity, the flattered silliness, the senile coquettishness, of which his benign countenance was capable."

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't mind him a bit, Mr. Bemis; it's nothing but—"

Lawton: "Pure envy. I own it."

Bemis: "All right, Lawton. Wait till—"

Mrs. Roberts, making a final stitch, snapping off the thread, and springing to her feet, all in one: "There, have you finished, Mr. and Mrs. Lou? Well, then, take this lace handkerchief, and draw it down from his neck and pin it in his waistcoat, and you have—"

Lawton, as Mr. Bemis rises to his feet: "A Gentleman of the Old School. Bemis, you look like a miniature of yourself by Malbone. Rather flattered, but—recognizable."

Bemis, with perfectly recovered gayety: "Go on, go on, Lawton. I can understand your envy. I can pity it."

Lawton: "Could you forgive Roberts for not capturing the garroter?"

Bemis: "Yes, I could. I could give the garroter his liberty, and present him with an admission to the Provident Wood-yard, where he could earn an honest living for his family."

Lawton, compassionately: "You *are* pretty far gone, Bemis. Really, I think somebody ought to go for Roberts."

Mrs. Roberts, innocently: "Yes, indeed! Why, what in the world can be keeping him?" A nursemaid enters and beckons Mrs. Roberts to the door with a glance. She runs to her; they whisper; and then Mrs. Roberts, over her shoulder, "That ridiculous great boy of mine says he can't go to sleep unless I come and kiss him good-night."

Lawton: "Which ridiculous great boy, I wonder?—Roberts or Campbell? But I didn't know they had gone to bed!"

Mrs. Bemis: "You are too bad, papa! You know it's little Neddy."

Mrs. Roberts, vanishing: "Oh, I don't mind his nonsense, Lou. I'll fetch them both back with me."

Lawton, after making a melodramatic search for concealed listeners at the doors: "Now, friends, I have a revelation to make in Mrs. Roberts' absence. I have found out the garroter—the assassin."

All the others: "What!"

Lawton: "He has been secured—"

Mrs. Crashaw, severely: "Well, I'm very glad of it."

Young Bemis: "By the police?"

Mrs. Bemis, incredulously: "Papa!"

Bemis: "But there were several of them. Have they all been arrested?"

Lawton: "There was only one, and none of him has been arrested."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Where is he, then?"

Lawton: "In this house."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Now, Doctor Lawton, you and I are old friends—I shouldn't like to say *how* old—but if you don't instantly be serious, I—I'll carry my rheumatism to somebody else."

Lawton: "My *dear* Mrs. Crashaw, you know how much I prize that rheumatism of yours! I will be

serious—I will be only too serious. The garroter is Mr. Roberts himself."

All, horror-struck: "Oh!"

Lawton: "He went out without his watch. He thought he was robbed, but he wasn't. He ran after the supposed thief, our poor friend Bemis here, and took Bemis' watch away and brought it home for his own."

Young Bemis: "Yes, but—"

Mrs. Bemis: "But, papa—"

Bemis: "How do you know it? I can see how such a thing might happen, but—how do you know it *did?*"

Lawton: "I divined it."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Nonsense!"

Lawton: "Very well, then, I read of just such a case in the *Advertiser* a year ago. It occurs annually—in the newspapers. And I'll tell you what, Mrs. Crashaw—Roberts found out his mistake as soon as he went to his dressing-room; and that ingenious nephew of yours, who's closeted with him there, has been trying to put him up to something—to some game."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Willis has too much sense. He would know that Edward couldn't carry out any sort of game."

Lawton: "Well, then, he's getting Roberts to let *him* carry out the game."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Edward couldn't do that, either."

Lawton: "Very well, then, just wait till they come back. Will you leave me to deal with Campbell?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "What are you going to do?"

Young Bemis: "You mustn't forget that he got us out of the elevator, sir."

Mrs. Bemis: "We might have been there yet if it hadn't been for him, papa."

Mrs. Crashaw: "I shouldn't want Willis mortified."

Bemis: "Nor Mr. Roberts annoyed. We're fellow-sufferers in this business."

Lawton: "Oh, leave it to me, leave it to me! I'll spare their feelings. Don't be afraid. Ah, there they come! Now don't say anything. I'll just step into the anteroom here."

II

MR. ROBERTS, MR. CAMPBELL, AND THE OTHERS

Roberts, entering the room before Campbell and shaking hands with his guests: "Ah, Mr. Bemis; Mrs. Bemis; Aunt Mary! You've heard of our comical little coincidence—our—Mr. Bemis and my—" He halts, confused, and looks around for the moral support of Willis, who follows hilariously.

Willis: "Greatest joke on record! But I won't spoil it for you, Roberts. Go on!" In a low voice to Roberts: "And don't look so confoundedly down in the mouth. They won't think it's a joke at all."

Roberts, with galvanic lightness: "Yes, yes—*such* a joke! Well, you see—you see—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "See *what,* Edward? *Do* get it out!"

Willis, jollily: "Ah, ha, ha!"

Roberts, lugubriously: "Ah, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Bemis: "How funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

Young Mr. Bemis: "Capital! capital!"

Bemis: "Excellent!"

Willis: "Go on, Roberts, do! or I shall die! Ah, ha, ha!"

Roberts, in a low voice of consternation to Willis: "Where was I? I can't go on unless I know where I was."

Willis, sotto voce to Roberts: "You weren't anywhere! For Heaven's sake, make a start!"

Roberts, to the others, convulsively: "Ha, ha, ha! I supposed all the time, you know, that I had been robbed, and—and—"

Willis: "Go on! *go* on!"

Roberts, whispering: "I can't do it!"

Willis, whispering: "You've *got* to! You're the beaver that clomb the tree. Laugh naturally now!"

Roberts, with a staccato groan, which he tries to make pass for a laugh: "And then I ran after the man—" He stops, and regards Mr. Bemis with a ghastly stare.

Mrs. Crashaw: "What is the matter with you, Edward? Are you sick?"

Willis: "Sick? No! Can't you see that he can't get over the joke of the thing? It's killing him." To Roberts: "Brace up, old man! You're doing it splendidly."

Roberts, hopelessly: "And then the other man—the man that had robbed me—the man that I had pursued —ugh!"

Willis: "Well, it *is* too much for him. I shall have to tell it myself, I see."

Roberts, making a wild effort to command himself: "And so—so—this man—man—ma—"

Willis: "Oh, good Lord—" Doctor Lawton suddenly appears from the anteroom and confronts him. "Oh, the devil!"

Lawton, folding his arms and fixing his eyes upon him: "Which means that you forgot I was coming."

Willis: "Doctor, you read a man's symptoms at a glance."

Lawton: "Yes; and I can see that you are in a bad way, Mr. Campbell."

Willis: "Why don't you advertise, Doctor? Patients need only enclose a lock of their hair and the color of their eyes, with one dollar to pay the cost of materials,

which will be sent, with full directions for treatment, by return mail. Seventh son of a seventh son."

Lawton: "Ah, don't try to jest it away, my poor friend. This is one of those obscure diseases of the heart—induration of the pericardium—which, if not taken in time, result in deceitfulness above all things, and desperate wickedness."

Willis: "Look here, Doctor Lawton, what are you up to?"

Lawton: "Look here, Mr. Campbell, what is your little game?"

Willis: "*I* don't know what you're up to." He shrugs his shoulders and walks up the room.

Lawton, shrugging his shoulders and walking up the room abreast of Campbell: "*I* don't know what your little game is." They return together and stop, confronting each other.

Willis: "But if you think I'm going to give myself away—"

Lawton: "If you suppose I'm going to take you at your own figure—" They walk up the room together and return as before.

Willis: "Mrs. Bemis, what is this unnatural parent of yours after?"

Mrs. Bemis, tittering: "Oh, I'm sure *I* can't tell."

Willis: "Aunt Mary, you used to be a friend of mine. Can't you give me some sort of clew?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "I should be ashamed of you, Willis, if you accepted anybody's help."

Willis, sighing: "Well, this is pretty hard on an orphan. Here I come to join a company of friends at the fireside of a burgled brother-in-law, and I find myself in a nest of conspirators." Suddenly, after a moment: "Oh, *I* understand. Why, I ought to have seen at once. But no matter—it's just as well. I'm

sure that we shall hear Doctor Lawton leniently, and make allowance for his well-known foible. Roberts is bound by the laws of hospitality, and Mr. Bemis is the father-in-law of his daughter."

Mrs. Bemis, in serious dismay: "Why, Mr. Campbell, what do you mean?"

Willis: "Simply that the mystery is solved—the double garroter is discovered. I'm sorry for you, Mrs. Bemis; and no one will wish to deal harshly with your father when he confesses that it was he who robbed Mr. Roberts and Mr. Bemis. All that they ask is to have their watches back. Go on, Doctor! How will that do, Aunt Mary, for a little flyer?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Willis, I declare I never saw anybody like you!" She embraces him with joyous pride.

Roberts, coming forward, anxiously: "But, my dear Willis—"

Willis, clapping his hand over his mouth and leading him back to his place: "We can't let you talk now. I've no doubt you'll be considerate and all that, but Doctor Lawton has the floor. Go on, Doctor! Free your mind! Don't be afraid of telling the whole truth! It will be better for you in the end." He rubs his hands gleefully, and then thrusting the points of them into his waistcoat-pockets, stands beaming triumphantly upon Lawton.

Lawton: "Do you think so?" With well-affected trepidation: "Well, friends, if I must confess this—this—"

Willis: "High-handed outrage. Go on."

Lawton: "I suppose I must. I shall not expect mercy for myself; perhaps you'll say that, as an old and hardened offender, I don't deserve it. But I had an accomplice — a young man very respectably connected, and who, whatever his previous life may have

been, had managed to keep a good reputation; a young man a little apt to be misled by overweening vanity and the ill-advised flattery of his friends; but I hope that neither of you gentlemen will be hard upon him, but will consider his youth, and perhaps his congenital moral and intellectual deficiencies, even when you find your watches — on Mr. Campbell's person." He leans forward, rubbing his hands, and smiling upon Campbell, "How will that do, Mr. Campbell, for a flyer?"

Willis, turning to Mrs. Crashaw: "One ahead, Aunt Mary?"

Lawton, clasping him by the hand: "No, generous youth—even!" They shake hands, clapping each other on the back with their lefts, and joining in the general laugh.

Bemis, coming forward, jovially: "Well, now, I gladly forgive you both—or whoever *did* rob me—if you'll only give me back my watch."

Willis: "*I* haven't got your watch."

Lawton: "Nor I."

Roberts, rather faintly, and coming reluctantly forward: "I — I have it, Mr. Bemis." He produces it from one waistcoat-pocket and hands it to Bemis. Then, visiting the other: "And what's worse, I have my own. I don't know how I can ever explain it or atone to you for my extraordinary behavior. Willis thought you might finally see it as a joke, and I've done my best to pass it off lightly—"

Willis: "And you succeeded. You had all the lightness of a sick hippopotamus."

Roberts: "I'm afraid so. I'll have the chain mended, of course. But when I went out this evening I left my watch on my dressing-table, and when you struck against me in the Common I missed it, and supposed I had been robbed, and I ran after you and took yours—"

Willis: "Being a man of the most violent temper and the most desperate courage—"

Roberts: "But I hope, my dear sir, that I didn't hurt you seriously?"

Bemis: "Not at all—not the least." Shaking him cordially by both hands: "I'm all right. Mrs. Roberts has healed all my wounds with her skilful needle; I've got on one of your best neckties, and this lace handkerchief of your wife's, which I'm going to keep for a souvenir of the most extraordinary adventure of my life—"

Lawton: "Oh, it's an old newspaper story, Bemis, I tell you."

Willis: "Well, Aunt Mary, I wish Agnes were here now to see Roberts in his character of *moral* hero. He 'done' it with his little hatchet, but he waited to make sure that Bushrod was all right before he owned up."

Mrs. Roberts, appearing: "Who, Willis?"

Willis: "A very great and good man—George Washington."

Mrs. Roberts: "I thought you meant Edward."

Willis: "Well, I don't suppose there *is* much difference."

Mrs. Crashaw: "The robber has been caught, Agnes."

Mrs. Roberts: "Caught? Nonsense! You don't mean it! How can you trifle with such a subject? I know you are joking! Who is it?"

Young Bemis: "You never could guess—"

Mrs. Bemis: "Never in the world!"

Mrs. Roberts: "I don't wish to. But oh, Mr. Bemis, I've just come from my own children, and you must be merciful to his family!"

Bemis: "For your sake, dear lady, I will."

Bella, between the portières: "Dinner is ready, Mrs. Roberts."

Mrs. Roberts, passing her hand through Mr. Bemis' arm: "Oh, then you must go in with me and tell me all about it."

FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

I

MRS. SOMERS; MR. WILLIS CAMPBELL

Mrs. Amy Somers, in a lightly floating tea-gown of singularly becoming texture and color, employs the last moments of expectance before the arrival of her guests in marching up and down in front of the mirror which fills the space between the long windows of her drawing-room, looking over either shoulder for different effects of the drifting and eddying train, and advancing upon her image with certain little bobs and bows, and retreating from it with a variety of fan practice and elaborated courtesies, finally degenerating into burlesque, and a series of grimaces and "mouths" made at the responsive reflex. In the fascination of this amusement she is first ignorant, and then aware, of the presence of Mr. Willis Campbell, who on the landing space between the drawing-room and the library stands, hat in hand, in the pleased contemplation of Mrs. Somers' manœuvres and contortions as the mirror reports them to him. Mrs. Somers does not permit herself the slightest start on seeing him in the glass, but turns deliberately away, having taken time to prepare the air of gratification and surprise with which she greets him at half the length of the drawing-room.

Mrs. Somers, giving her hand: "Why, Mr. Campbell! How very nice of you! How long have you been prowling about there on the landing? So stupid of them not to have turned up the gas!"

Campbell: "I wasn't much incommoded. That sort of pitch-darkness is rather becoming to my style of beauty, I find. The only objection was that I couldn't see you."

Mrs. Somers: "Do you often make those pretty speeches?"

Campbell: "When I can found them on fact."

Mrs. Somers: "What can I say back? Oh! That I'm sorry I couldn't have met you when you were looking your best."

Campbell: "Um! Do you think you could have borne it? We might go out there."

Mrs. Somers: "On second thoughts, no. I shall ring to have them turn up the gas."

Campbell: "No; let me." He prevents her ringing, and going out into the space between the library and drawing-room, stands with his hand on the key of the gas-burner. "Now how do I look?"

Mrs. Somers: "Beautiful."

Campbell, turning up the gas: "And now?"

Mrs. Somers: "Not *half* so well. Decidedly pitch-darkness is becoming to you. Better turn it down again."

Campbell, rejoining her in the drawing-room: "No; it isn't so becoming to you; and I'm not envious, whatever I am."

Mrs. Somers: "You are generosity itself."

Campbell: "If you come to phrases, I prefer magnanimity."

Mrs. Somers: "Well, *say* magnanimity. Won't you sit down—while you have the opportunity?" She sinks

upon the sofa, and indicates with her fan an easy-chair at one end of it.

Campbell, dropping into it: "Are there going to be so many?"

Mrs. Somers: "You never can tell about five-o'clock tea. There mayn't be more than half a dozen; there may be thirty or forty. But I wished to affect your imagination."

Campbell: "You had better have tried it in some other kind of weather. It's snowing like—"

Mrs. Somers, running to the window and peeping out through the side of the curtain: "It is! Like—cats and dogs!"

Campbell: "Oh no! You can't say that. It only rains that way. I was going to say it myself, but I stopped in time."

Mrs. Somers, standing before the window with clasped hands: "No matter! There will simply be nobody but bores. *They* come in any sort of weather."

Campbell: "Thank you, Mrs. Somers. I'm glad I ventured out."

Mrs. Somers, turning about: "What?" Then realizing the situation: "Oh, *poor* Mr. Campbell!"

Campbell: "Oh, don't mind *me!* I can stand it if you can. I belong to a sex, thank you, that doesn't pretend to have any tact. I would just as soon tell a man he was a bore as not. But I thought it might worry a lady, perhaps."

Mrs. Somers: "Worry? I'm simply aghast at it. Did you ever hear of anything worse?"

Campbell: "Well, not much worse."

Mrs. Somers: "What can I do to make you forget it?"

Campbell: "I can't think of anything. It seems to me that I shall always remember it as the most fort-

unate speech a lady ever made to me—and they have said some flattering things to me in my time."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, don't be entirely heartless. Wouldn't a cup of tea blot it out? With a Peak & Frean?" She advances beseechingly upon him. "Come, I will give you a cup at once."

Campbell: "No, thank you; I would rather have it with the rest of the bores. They'll be sure to come."

Mrs. Somers, resuming her seat on the sofa: "You are implacable. And I thought you said you were generous."

Campbell: "No; merely magnanimous. I can't forget your cruel frankness; but I know *you* can, and I ask you to do it." He throws himself back in his chair with a sigh. "And who knows? Perhaps you were right."

Mrs. Somers: "About what?"

Campbell: "My being a bore."

Mrs. Somers: "I should think *you* would know."

Campbell: "No; that's the difficulty. Nobody would be a bore if he knew it."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, *some* would, I think."

Campbell: "Do you mean me?"

Mrs. Somers: "Well, no, then. I don't believe you would be a bore, if you knew it. Is that enough, or do you expect me to say something more?"

Campbell: "No; it's quite enough, thank you." He remains pensively silent.

Mrs. Somers, after waiting for him to speak: "Bores for bores, don't you hate the silent ones most?"

Campbell, desperately rousing himself: "Mrs. Somers, if you only knew how disagreeable I was going to make myself just before I concluded to hold my tongue!"

Mrs. Somers: "Really? What were you going to say?"

Campbell: "Do you actually wish to know?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh no; I only thought you wished to tell."

Campbell: "Not at all. You complained of my being silent."

Mrs. Somers: "Did I? I was wrong. I will never do so again." She laughs in her fan.

Campbell: "And I complain of your delay. You can tell me now, just as well as two weeks hence, whether you love me enough to marry me or not."

Mrs. Somers: "You promised not to recur to that subject without some hint from me. You have broken your promise."

Campbell: "Well, you wouldn't give me any hint."

Mrs. Somers: "How can I believe you care for me if you are false in this?"

Campbell: "It seems to me that my falsehood is another proof of my affection."

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then; you can wait till I know my mind."

Campbell: "I'd rather know your heart. But I'll wait." After a pause: "Why do you carry a fan on a day like this? I ask, to make general conversation."

Mrs. Somers, spreading the fan in her lap and looking at it curiously: "I don't know." After a moment: "Oh yes; for the same reason that I shall have ice-cream after dinner to-day."

Campbell: "That's no reason at all." After a moment: "Are you going to have ice-cream to-day after dinner?"

Mrs. Somers: "I might—if I had company."

Campbell: "Oh, I couldn't stay after hinting. I'm

too proud for that." He pulls his chair nearer and joins her in examining the fan in her lap. "What is so very strange about your fan?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nothing. I was just seeing how a fan looked that was the subject of gratuitous criticism."

Campbell: "I didn't criticise the *fan*." He regards it studiously.

Mrs. Somers: "Oh! *Not* the fan?"

Campbell: "No; I think it's extremely pretty. I like big fans."

Mrs. Somers: "So good of you! It's Spanish. That's why it's so large."

Campbell: "It's hand-painted, too."

Mrs. Somers, leaning back and leaving him to the inspection of the fan: "You're a connoisseur, Mr. Campbell."

Campbell: "Oh, I can tell hand-painting from machine-painting when I see it. 'Tisn't so good."

Mrs. Somers: "Thank you."

Campbell: "Not at all. Now, that fellow—cavalier, I suppose, in Spain—making love in that attitude, you can see at a glance that *he's* hand-painted. No *machine*-painted cavalier would do it in that way. And look at the lady's hand. Who ever saw a hand of that size before?"

Mrs. Somers, unclasping the hands which she had folded at her waist and putting one of them out to take up the fan: "You said you were not criticising the fan."

Campbell, quickly seizing the hand with the fan in it: "Ah, I'm wrong! Here's another one no bigger. Let me see which is the largest."

Mrs. Somers, struggling not very violently to free her hand: "Mr. Campbell!"

Campbell: "Don't take it away! You must listen to me now, Amy."

Mrs. Somers, rising abruptly, and dropping her fan as she comes forward to meet an elderly gentleman arriving from the landing: "Mr. Bemis! How very heroic of you to come such a day! Isn't it too bad?"

II

MR. BEMIS; MRS. SOMERS; MR. WILLIS CAMPBELL

Bemis: "Not if it makes me specially welcome, Mrs. Somers." Discovering Campbell: "Oh, Mr. Campbell!"

Campbell, striving for his self-possession as they shake hands: "Yes, another hero, Mr. Bemis. Mrs. Somers is going to brevet everybody who comes to-day. —She didn't *say* heroes to me, but—"

Mrs. Somers: "You shall have your tea at once, Mr. Bemis." She rings. "I was making Mr. Campbell wait for his. You don't order up the teapot for one hero."

Bemis: "Ha, ha, ha! No, indeed! But I'm very glad you do for two. The fact is"—rubbing his hands —"I'm half frozen."

Mrs. Somers: "Is it so very cold?" To Campbell, who presents her fan with a bow: "Oh, thank you." To Mr. Bemis: "Mr. Campbell has just been objecting to my fan. He doesn't like its being hand-painted, as he calls it."

Bemis: "That reminds me of a California gentleman whom I found looking at an Andrea del Sarto in the Pitti Palace at Florence one day — by-the-way, *you've* been a Californian, too, Mr. Campbell; but you won't mind. He seemed to be puzzled over it, and then

he said to me—I was standing near him—'Hand-painted, I presume?'"

Mrs. Somers: "Ah! ha, ha, ha! How very good!" To the maid, who appears: "The tea, Lizzie."

Campbell: "You don't think he was joking?"

Bemis, with misgiving: "Why, no, it never occurred to me that he was."

Campbell: "You can't always tell when a Californian's joking."

Mrs. Somers, with insinuation: "*Can't* you? Not even adoptive ones?"

Campbell: "Adoptive ones never joke."

Mrs. Somers: "Not even about hand-painted fans? What an interesting fact!" She sits down on the sofa, behind the little table on which the maid arranges the tea and pours out a cup. Then, with her eyes on Mr. Bemis: "Cream and sugar both? Yes?" Holding a cube of sugar in the tongs: "How many?"

Bemis: "One, please."

Mrs. Somers, handing it to him: "I'm so glad you take your tea au naturel, as *I* call it."

Campbell: "What do you call it when they don't take it with cream and sugar?"

Mrs. Somers: "Au unnaturel. There's only one thing worse—taking it with a slice of lemon in it. You might as well draw it from a bothersome samovar at once and be done with it."

Campbell: "The samovar is picturesque."

Mrs. Somers: "It is insincere. Like Californians. Natives."

Campbell: "Well, I can think of something much worse than tea with lemon in it."

Mrs. Somers: "What?"

Campbell: "No tea at all."

Mrs. Somers, recollecting herself: "Oh, *poor* Mr. Campbell! Two lumps?"

Campbell: "One, thank you. Your pity is so sweet!"

Mrs. Somers: "You ought to have thought of the milk of human kindness and spared my cream-jug, too."

Campbell: "You didn't pour out your compassion soon enough."

Bemis, who has been sipping his tea in silent admiration: "Are you often able to keep it up in that way? I was fancying myself at the theatre."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, *don't* encore us! Mr. Campbell would keep saying his things over indefinitely."

Campbell, presenting his cup: "Another lump. It's turned bitter. *Two!*"

Bemis: "Ha, ha, ha! Very good—very good, indeed!"

Campbell: "Thank you kindly, Mr. Bemis."

Mrs. Somers, greeting the new arrivals, and leaning forward to shake hands with them as they come up without rising: "Mrs. Roberts! How very good of you! And Mr. Roberts!"

III

MR. AND MRS. ROBERTS AND THE OTHERS

Roberts: "Not at all."

Mrs. Roberts: "Of course we were coming."

Mrs. Somers: "Will you have some tea? You see I'm installed already. Mr. Campbell was so greedy he wouldn't wait."

Campbell: "Mr. Bemis and I are here in the character of heroes, and we had to have our tea at once. You're a hero too, Roberts, though you don't look it. Any one who comes to tea in such weather is a hero or a—"

Mrs. Somers, interrupting him with a little shriek: "Ugh! How hot that handle's getting!"

Campbell: "Ah, I dare say. Let me turn out my sister's cup." Pouring out the tea and handing it to Mrs. Roberts. "I don't see how you could reconcile it to your No. Eleven conscience to leave your children in such a snow-storm as this, Agnes."

Mrs. Roberts, in vague alarm: "Why, what in the world could happen to them, Willis?"

Campbell: "Oh, nothing to *them.* But suppose Roberts got snowed under. Have some tea, Roberts?" He offers to pour out a cup.

Mrs. Somers, dispossessing him of the teapot with dignity: "Thank you, Mr. Campbell; *I* will pour out the tea."

Campbell: "Oh, very well. I thought the handle was hot."

Mrs. Somers: "It's cooler now."

Campbell: "And you won't let me help you?"

Mrs. Somers: "When there are more people you may hand the tea."

Campbell: "I wish I knew just how much that meant."

Mrs. Somers: "Very little. As little as an adoptive Californian in his most earnest mood." While they talk —Campbell bending over the teapot, on which Mrs. Somers keeps her hand—the others form a little group apart.

Bemis, to Mrs. Roberts: "I hope Mr. Roberts' distinguished friend won't give us the slip on account of the storm."

Roberts: "Oh no; he'll be sure to come. He may be late. But he's the most amiable of Englishmen, and I know he won't disappoint Mrs. Somers."

Bemis: "The most unamiable of Englishmen couldn't do that."

Roberts: "Ah, I don't know. Did you meet Mr. Pogis?"

Bemis: "No; what did he do?"

Roberts: "Why, he came—to the Hibbens' dinner—in a sack coat."

Mrs. Roberts: "I thought it was a cardigan jacket."

Bemis: "*I* heard a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers."

Mrs. Somers: "Ah, there is Mrs. Curwen!" To Campbell, aside: "And without her husband!"

Campbell: "Or any one else's husband!"

Mrs. Somers: "For shame!"

Campbell: "You began it."

Mrs. Somers to Mrs. Curwen, who approaches her sofa: "You are kindness itself, Mrs. Curwen, to come on such a day." The ladies press each other's hands.

IV

MRS. CURWEN AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Curwen: "You are goodness in person, Mrs. Somers, to say so."

Campbell: "And I am magnanimity embodied. Let me introduce myself, Mrs. Curwen!" He bows, and Mrs. Curwen deeply courtesies.

Mrs. Curwen: "I should never have known you."

Campbell, melodramatically, to Mrs. Somers: "Tea, ho! for Mrs. Curwen—impenetrably disguised as kindness."

Mrs. Curwen: "What shall I say to him?"

Mrs. Somers, pouring the tea: "Anything you like, Mrs. Curwen. Aren't we to see Mr. Curwen to-day?"

Mrs. Curwen, taking her tea: "No, I'm his insufficient apology. He's detained at his office—business."

Campbell: "Then, you see, they don't *all* come, Mrs. Somers."

Mrs. Curwen: "All what?"

Campbell: "Oh, all the—heroes."

Mrs. Curwen: "Is that what he was going to say, Mrs. Somers?"

Mrs. Somers: "You never can tell what he's going to say."

Mrs. Curwen: "I should think you would be afraid of him."

Mrs. Somers, with a little shrug: "Oh no; he's quite harmless. It's just a little way he has." To Mr. and

Mrs. Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Bemis, and Doctor Lawton, who all appear together: "Ah, how do you do? So glad to see you! So very kind of you! I didn't suppose *you* would venture out. And you too, Doctor?" She begins to pour out tea for them, one after another, with great zeal.

V

DOCTOR LAWTON, MR. AND MRS. MILLER, YOUNG MR. AND MRS. BEMIS, AND THE OTHERS

Doctor Lawton: "Yes, I too. It sounded very much as if I were Brutus also." He stirs his tea and stares round at the company. "It seems to me that I have met these conspirators before. That's what makes Boston insupportable. You're always meeting the same people!"

Campbell: "We all feel it as keenly as you do, Doctor."

Lawton, looking sharply at him: "Oh! *you* here? I might have expected it. Where is your aunt?"

VI

MRS. CRASHAW AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Crashaw, appearing: "If you mean me, Doctor Lawton—"

Lawton: "I do, my dear friend. What company is complete without you?"

Mrs. Somers, reaching forward to take her hand, while with her disengaged hand she begins to pour her a cup of tea: "None in *my* house."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Very pretty." Taking her tea. "I hope it isn't complete, either, without the English painter you promised us."

Mrs. Somers: "No, indeed! And a great many other people besides. But haven't you met him yet? I supposed Mrs. Roberts—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Oh, I don't go to *all* of Agnes' fandangoes. I was to have seen him at Mrs. Wheeler's —he is being asked everywhere, of course—but he didn't come. He sent his father and mother instead. They were very nice old people, but they hadn't painted his pictures."

Lawton: "They might say his pictures would never have been painted without them."

Bemis: "It was like Heine's going to visit Rachel by appointment. She wasn't in, but her father and mother were; and when he met her afterward he told her that he had just come from a show where he had seen a curious monster advertised for exhibition—the

"WILL YOU ANSWER MY QUESTION, AMY?"

offspring of a hare and a salmon. The monster was not to be seen at the moment, but the showman said here was monsieur the hare and madame the salmon."

Mrs. Roberts: "What in the world did Rachel say?"

Lawton: "Ah, that's what these brilliant anecdotes never tell. And I think it would be very interesting to know what the victim of a witticism has to say."

Mrs. Curwen: "I should think you would know very often, Doctor."

Lawton: "Ah, now I should like to know what the victim of a compliment says!"

Mrs. Curwen: "He bows his thanks." Doctor Lawton makes a profound obeisance, to which Mrs. Curwen responds in burlesque.

Miller: "We all envy you, Doctor."

Mrs. Miller: "Oh yes. Mrs. Curwen never makes a compliment without meaning it."

Mrs. Curwen: "I can't say that quite, my dear. I should be very sorry to mean all the civil things I say. But I never flatter gentlemen of a certain age."

Mrs. Miller, tittering ineffectively: "I shall know what to say to Mr. Miller after this."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Well, if you haven't got the man, Mrs. Somers, you *have* got his picture, haven't you?"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes; it's on my writing-desk in the library. Let me—"

Lawton: "No, no; don't disturb yourself! We wish to tear it to pieces without your embarrassing presence. Will you take my arm, Mrs. Crashaw?"

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, let us all go and see it!"

Roberts: "Aren't you coming, Willis?"

Campbell, without looking round: "Thank you, I've seen it."

Mrs. Somers, whom the withdrawal of her other

guests has left alone with him: "How could you tell such a fib?"

Campbell: "I could tell much worse fibs than that in such a cause."

Mrs. Somers: "What cause?"

Campbell: "A lost one, I'm afraid. Will you answer my question, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers: "Did you ask me any?"

Campbell: "You know I did—before those people came in."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, *that!* Yes. I should like to ask *you* a question first."

Campbell: "Twenty, if you like."

Mrs. Somers: "Why do you feel authorized to call me by my first name?"

Campbell: "Because I love you. Now will you answer me?"

Mrs. Somers, dreamily: "I didn't say I would, did I?"

Campbell, rising sadly: "No."

Mrs. Somers, mechanically taking the hand he offers her: "Oh! What—"

Campbell: "I'm going; that's all."

Mrs. Somers: "So soon?"

Campbell: "Yes; but I'll try to make amends by not coming back soon—or at all."

Mrs. Somers: "You mustn't."

Campbell: "Mustn't what?"

Mrs. Somers: "You mustn't keep my hand. Here come some more people. Ah, Mrs. Canfield! Miss Bayly! So very nice of you, Mrs. Wharton! Will you have some tea?"

VII

MRS. CAMPBELL, MISS BAYLY, MRS. WHARTON, AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Wharton: "No, thank you. The only objection to afternoon tea is the tea."

Mrs. Somers: "I'm so glad you don't mind the weather." With her hand on the teapot, glancing up at Miss Bayly: "And do you refuse, too?"

Miss Bayly: "I can answer for Mrs. Canfield that *she* doesn't, and I *never* do. *We* object to the weather."

Mrs. Somers, pouring a cup of tea: "That makes it a little more difficult. I can keep from offering Mrs. Wharton some tea, but I can't stop its snowing."

Miss Bayly, taking her cup: "But you're so amiable; we know you would if you could, and that's quite enough. We're not the first and only, are we?"

Mrs. Somers: "*Dear,* no! There are multitudes of flattering spirits in the library, stopping the mouth of my portrait with pretty speeches."

Miss Bayly, vividly: "Not your *Bramford* portrait?"

Mrs. Somers: "My Bramford *portrait.*"

Miss Bayly to the other ladies: "Oh, let us go and see it, too!" They flutter out of the drawing-room, where Mrs. Somers and Campbell remain alone together as before. He continues silent, while she waits for him to speak.

VIII

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

Mrs. Somers, finally: "Well?"

Campbell: "Well, what?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nothing. Only I thought you were —you were going to—"

Campbell: "No; I've got nothing to say."

Mrs. Somers: "I didn't mean that. I thought you were going to—go." She puts up her hand and hides a triumphant little smile with it.

Campbell: "Very well, then, I'll go, since you wish it." He holds out his hand.

Mrs. Somers, putting hers behind her: "You've shaken hands once. Besides, who said I wished you to go?"

Campbell: "Do you wish me to stay?"

Mrs. Somers: "I wish you to—hand tea to people."

Campbell: "And you won't say anything more?"

Mrs. Somers: "It seems to me that's enough."

Campbell: "It isn't enough for me. But I suppose beggars mustn't be choosers. I can't stay merely to hand tea to people, however. You can say yes or no now, Amy, as well as any other time."

Mrs. Somers: "Well, no, then—if you wish it so much."

Campbell: "You know I don't wish it."

Mrs. Somers: "You gave me my choice. I thought you were indifferent about the word."

MRS. SOMERS, POURING A CUP OF TEA: "THAT MAKES IT A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULT."

Campbell: "You know better than that, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "Amy again! Aren't you a little previous, Mr. Campbell?"

Campbell, with a sigh: "Ah, that's for you to say."

Mrs. Somers: "Wouldn't it be impolite?"

Campbell: "Oh, not for *you.*"

Mrs. Somers: "If you're so sarcastic I shall be afraid of you."

Campbell: "Under what circumstances?"

Mrs. Somers, dropping her eyes: "I don't know." He makes a rush upon her. "Oh! here comes Mrs. Curwen! Shake hands, as if you were going."

IX

MRS. CURWEN; MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

Mrs. Curwen: "What! is Mr. Campbell going, *too?*"

Mrs. Somers: "Too? *You're* not going, Mrs. Curwen?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes, I'm going. The likeness is perfect, Mrs. Somers. It's a speaking likeness, if there ever was one."

Campbell: "Did it do all the talking?"

Mrs. Curwen: "It would—if Mrs. Roberts and Doctor Lawton hadn't been there. Well, I must go."

Campbell: "So must I."

Mrs. Somers, in surprise: "*Must* you?"

Campbell: "Yes; these drifts will be over my ears directly."

Mrs. Curwen: "You poor man! You don't mean to say you're *walking?*"

Campbell: "I shall be, in about half a minute."

Mrs. Curwen: "Indeed you shall not! You shall be driving—with me. I've a vacancy in the coupé, and I'll set you down wherever you like."

Campbell: "Won't it crowd you?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Not at all."

Campbell: "Or incommode you in any way?"

Mrs. Curwen: "It will oblige me in every way."

Campbell: "Then I will go, and a thousand thanks. Good-bye again, Mrs. Somers."

Mrs. Curwen: "Good-bye, Mrs. Somers. Poor Mrs.

Somers! It seems too bad to leave you here alone, bowed in an elegiac attitude over your tea-urn."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, not at all! Remember me to *Mr.* Curwen."

Mrs. Curwen: "I will. Well, Mr. Campbell—"

Mrs. Somers: "Mr. Campbell—"

Campbell: "Well?"

Mrs. Curwen: "To which?"

Campbell: "Both."

Mrs. Somers: "Neither!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Ah! ha, ha, ha! Mr. Campbell, do you know much about women?"

Campbell: "I had a mother."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, a *mother* won't do."

Campbell: "Well, I have an only sister who is a woman."

Mrs. Curwen: "A sister won't do, *either*—not your own. You can't learn a woman's meaning in that way."

Campbell: "I will sit at your feet, Mrs. Curwen, if you'll instruct me."

Mrs. Curwen: "I shall be delighted. I'll begin now. Oh, you needn't really prostrate yourself!" She stops him in a burlesque attempt to do so. "And I'll concentrate the wisdom of the whole first lesson in a single word."

Campbell, with clasped hands of entreaty: "Speak, blessed ghost!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Stay! Ah! ha, ha, ha!" She flies at Mrs. Somers and kisses her. "You can't say I'm ill-natured, my dear, whatever I am!"

Mrs. Somers, pursuing her exit with the word: "No, merely atrocious." A pause ensues, in which Campbell stands irresolute.

X

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

Campbell, finally: "Did you wish me to stay, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers, airily: "I? Oh no! It was Mrs. Curwen."

Campbell: "Then I think I'll accept her kind offer of a seat in her coupé."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh! I thought, of course, you'd stay —at *her* request."

Campbell: "No; I shall only stay at yours."

Mrs. Somers: "And I shall not ask you. In fact, I warn you not to."

Campbell: "Why?"

Mrs. Somers: "Because, if you urge me to speak now, I shall say—"

Campbell: "I wasn't going to urge you."

Mrs. Somers: "No matter! I shall say it now without being urged. Yes, I've made up my mind. I can't marry a flirt."

Campbell: "I can, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "Sir!"

Campbell: "You know very well you sent those people into the other room to keep me here and torment me—"

Mrs. Somers: "*Now* you've *insulted* me, and all *is* over."

Campbell: "—to tantalize me with your loveliness, your beauty, your grace, Amy!"

Mrs. Somers, softening: "Oh, that's all very well—"

Campbell: "I'm glad you like it. I could go on at much greater length. But you know I love you dearly, Amy, and why should you delight in my agonies? But only marry me, and you shall delight in them as long as you live, and—"

Mrs. Somers: "You must hold me very cheap to think I would take you from that creature."

Campbell: "Confound her! I wasn't hers to give. I offered myself first."

Mrs. Somers: "She offered you last, and—no, thank you, please."

Campbell: "Do you really mean it?"

Mrs. Somers: "I shall not say. Or, yes, I *will* say. If that woman, who seems to have you at her beck and call, had not intermeddled, I might have made you a very different answer. But now my eyes are opened, and I see what I should have to expect, and—no, thank you, please."

Campbell: "And if she hadn't offered me—"

Mrs. Somers, drawing out her handkerchief and putting it to her eyes: "I was feeling kindly toward you—I was such a little fool—"

Campbell: "Amy!"

Mrs. Somers: "And you knew how much I disliked her."

Campbell: "Yes, I saw by the way you kissed each other."

Mrs. Somers: "Nonsense! You knew that meant nothing. But if it had been anybody else in the world but her, I shouldn't have minded it. And now—"

Campbell: "Now—"

Mrs. Somers: "—now all those geese are coming back from the other room, and they'll see that I've been

crying, and everybody will know everything. Willis—"

Campbell: "Willis?"

Mrs. Somers: "Let me go! I must bathe my eyes! You stay here and receive them! I'll be back at once!" She escapes from the arms stretched toward her, and out of the door, just before her guests enter from the library, and Campbell remains to receive them. The ladies, in returning, call over one another's heads and shoulders.

XI

MR. CAMPBELL AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Roberts: "Amy, it's *lovely!* But it doesn't *half* do you justice."

Young Mrs. Bemis: "It's too sweet for *anything,* Mrs. Somers."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Why did you let the man put you into that ridiculous seventeenth-century dress? Can't he paint a modern frock?"

Mrs. Wharton: "But what exquisite coloring, Mrs. Somers!"

Mrs. Miller: "He's got just your lovely turn of the head."

Miss Bayly: "And the way you hold your fan—what character he's thrown into it!"

Mrs. Roberts: "And that fall of the skirt, Amy; that skirt is *full* of character!" She discovers Mr. Campbell behind the tea-urn. He has Mrs. Somers' light wrap on his shoulders and her fan in his hand, and he alternately hides his blushes with it and coquettishly folds and pats his mouth in a gross caricature of Mrs. Somers' manner. In rising he twitches his coat forward in a similar burlesque of a lady's management of her skirt. "Why, where is Amy, Willis?"

Campbell: "Gone a moment. Some trouble about —the hot water."

Lawton: "Hot water that you've been getting into? Ah, young man, look me in the eye!"

Campbell: "Your glass one, Doctor?"

Young Mr. Bemis: "Why, my dear, has your father got a glass eye?"

Mrs. Bemis: "Of *course* he hasn't! What an idea! I don't know what Mr. Campbell means."

Lawton: "I've no doubt he wishes I had a glass eye—two of them, for that matter. But that isn't answering my question. Where is Mrs. Somers?"

Campbell: "That was my sister's question, and I did answer it. Have some tea, ladies? I'm glad you like my portrait, and that you think he's got my lovely turn of the head, and the way I hold my fan, and the character of my skirt; but I agree with you that it isn't half as pretty as I am."

The Ladies: "Oh, what shall we do to him? Prescribe for us, Doctor."

Campbell: "No, no! I want the Doctor's services myself. I don't want him to give me his medicines. I want him to give me away."

Lawton: "You're tired of giving yourself away, then?"

Campbell: "It's of no use. They won't have me."

Lawton: "Who won't?"

Campbell: "Oh, I'll leave Mrs. Somers to say."

XII

MRS. SOMERS AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Somers, radiantly reappearing: "Say what?" She has hidden the traces of her tears from every one but the ladies by a light application of powder, and she knows that they all know she has been crying, and this makes her a little more smiling. "Say what?" She addresses the company in general rather than Campbell.

Campbell, with caricatured tenderness: "Say yes."

Mrs. Somers: "What does he mean, Doctor?"

Lawton: "Oh, I'm afraid he's past all surgery. I give him over to you, Mrs. Somers."

Campbell: "There, now. She wasn't the last to do it!"

Mrs. Somers, with the resolution of a widow: "Well, I suppose there's nothing else for it, then. I'll see what can be done for your patient, Doctor." She passes her hand through Campbell's arm where he continues to stand behind the tea-table.

Mrs. Roberts, falling upon her and kissing her: "Amy, you don't *mean* it!"

Mrs. Bemis, embracing her in turn: "I never can believe it."

Mrs. Crashaw: "It is ridiculous! What! Willis?"

Mrs. Miller: "It does seem too nice to be true."

Bemis: "You astonish us!"

Roberts: "We never should have dreamed of it."

Young Mr. Bemis: "You *must* give us time to realize it."

Mrs. Wharton: "Is it *possible?*"

Miss Bayly: "*Is* it possible?" They all shake hands with Mrs. Somers in turn.

Roberts: "Isn't this rather sudden, Willis?"

Campbell: "Well, it is—for Mrs. Somers, perhaps. But *I've* found it awfully gradual."

Mrs. Somers: "Nonsense! It's an old story for both of us."

Campbell: "Well, what I like about it is, it's *true.* Founded on fact!"

Mrs. Roberts: "I *can't* believe it!"

Campbell: "Well, I don't know whom all this charming incredulity's intended to flatter; but if it's I, I say no, *not* really at all! It's merely a little *coup de théâtre* we've been arranging."

Lawton, patting him on the shoulder: "One ahead, as usual."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, thank you, Doctor! There are two of us ahead now."

Lawton: "*I* believe you, at any rate. Bravo!" He initiates an applause in which all the rest join, while Campbell catches up Mrs. Somers' fan and unfurls it before both their faces.

THE MOUSE-TRAP

THE MOUSE-TRAP

I

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

In her drawing-room, Mrs. Amy Somers, young, pretty, stylish, in the last evanescent traces of widowhood, stands confronting Mr. Willis Campbell. She has a newspaper in her hand, folded to the width of a single column, which she extends toward him with an effect of indignant menace.

Mrs. Somers: "Then you acknowledge that it is yours?"

Campbell: "I acknowledge that I made a speech before the legislative committee on behalf of the anti-suffragists. You knew I was going to do that. I don't know how they've reported it."

Mrs. Somers, with severity: "Very well, then; I will read it: 'Willis Campbell, Esq., was next heard on behalf of the petitioners. He touched briefly upon the fact that the suffrage was evidently not desired by the vast majority of educated women.'"

Campbell: "You've always said they didn't want it."

Mrs. Somers: "That is not the point." Reading: "'And many of them would feel it an onerous burden, and not a privilege.'"

Campbell: "Well, didn't you—"

Mrs. Somers: "Don't interrupt!" Reading: "'Which would compel them, at the cost of serious sacrifices, to contend at the polls with the ignorant classes who would be sure to exercise the right if conferred.'"

Campbell: "That was your own argument, Amy. They're almost your own words."

Mrs. Somers: "That isn't what I object to." Reading: "'Mr. Campbell then referred in a more humorous strain to the argument, frequently used by the suffragists, that every tax-payer should have the right to vote. He said that he objected to this, because it implied that non-tax-payers should not have the right to vote, which would deprive of the suffrage a large body of adoptive citizens, who voted at all the elections with great promptness and assiduity. He thought the exemption of women from some duties required of men by the State fairly offset the loss of the ballot in their case, and that until we were prepared to send ladies to battle we ought not to oblige them to go to the polls. Some skirmishing ensued between Mr. Campbell and Mr. Willington, on the part of the suffragists, the latter gentleman affirming that in great crises of the world's history women had shown as much courage as men, and the former contending that this did not at all affect his position, since the courage of women was in high degree a moral courage, which was not evoked by the ordinary conditions of peace or war, but required the imminence of some extraordinary, some vital emergency.'"

Campbell: "Well, what do you object to in all that?"

Mrs. Somers, tossing the paper on the table and confronting him with her head lifted and her hands clasped upon her left side: "Everything! It is an insult to women."

Campbell: "*Woman,* you mean. I don't think *women* would mind it. Who's been talking to you, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nobody. It doesn't matter who's been talking to me. That is not the question."

Campbell: "It's the question I asked."

Mrs. Somers: "It isn't the question *I* asked. I wish simply to know what you mean by that speech."

Campbell: "I wish you knew how pretty you look in that dress." Mrs. Somers involuntarily glances down at the skirt of it on either side and rearranges it a little, folding her hands again as before. "But perhaps you do."

Mrs. Somers, with dignity: "Will you answer my question?"

Campbell: "Certainly. I meant what I said."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, you did! Very well, then! When a woman stands by the bedside of her sick child, and risks her life from contagion, what kind of courage do you call that?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "And when she remains in a burning building or a sinking ship—as they often do—and perishes, while her child is saved, what kind of courage is it?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "When she seizes an axe and defends her little ones against a bear or a wolf that's just bursting in the cabin door, what kind of courage does she show?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "Or when her babe crawls up the track, and she snatches it from the very jaws of the cow-catcher—"

Campbell: "Oh, hold on now, Amy! Be fair! It's the engineer who does that: he runs along the side of

the locomotive, and catches the smiling infant up, and lays it in the mother's arms as the train thunders by. His name is usually Hank Rollins. The mother is always paralyzed with terror."

Mrs. Somers: "Of course she is. But in those other cases, how does her courage differ from a man's? If hers is always moral, what kind of courage does a man show when he faces the cannon?"

Campbell: "Immoral. Come, Amy, are you trying to prove that women are braver than men? Well, they are. I never was in any danger yet that I didn't wish I was a woman, for then I should have the courage to face it, or else I could turn and run without disgrace. All that I said in that speech was that women haven't so much nerve as men."

Mrs. Somers: "They have more."

Campbell: "Nerves—yes."

Mrs. Somers: "No, nerve. Take Dr. Cissy Gay, that little, slender, delicate, sensitive thing: what do you suppose she went through when she was studying medicine, and walking the hospitals, and all those disgusting things? And Mrs. J. Plunkett Harmon: do you mean to say that *she* has no nerve, facing all sorts of audiences, on the platform, everywhere? Or Rev. Lily Barber, living down all that ridicule and going quietly on in her work—"

Campbell: "Oh, *they've* been talking to you."

Mrs. Somers: "They have *not!* And if they have, Dr. Gay is as much opposed to suffrage as you are."

Campbell: "As *I?* Aren't you opposed to it, too?"

Mrs. Somers: "Of course I am. Or I was till you made that speech."

Campbell: "It wasn't exactly intended to convert you."

Mrs. Somers: "It has placed me in a false position.

Everybody knows, or the same as knows, that we're engaged—"

Campbell: "Well, *I'm* not ashamed of it, Amy."

Mrs. Somers, severely: "No matter! And now it will look as if I had no ideas of my own, and was just swayed about any way by you. A woman is despicable that joins with men in ridiculing women."

Campbell: "Who's been saying that?"

Mrs. Somers: "No one. It doesn't matter who's been saying it. Mrs. Mervane has been saying it."

Campbell: "Mrs. Mervane?"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, Mrs. Mervane, that you're always praising and admiring so for her good sense and her right ideas. Didn't you say she wrote as logically and forcibly as a man?"

Campbell: "Yes, I did."

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then, she says that if anything could turn her in favor of suffrage it is that speech of yours. She says it's a subtle attack upon the whole sex."

Campbell: "Well, I give it up! You are all alike. You take everything personally, in the first place, and then you say it's an attack on all women. Couldn't I make this right by publishing a card to acknowledge your physical courage before the whole community, Amy? Then your friends would have to say that I had recognized the pluck of universal womanhood."

Mrs. Somers: "No, sir; you can't make it right now. And I'm sorry, sorry, *sorry* I signed the anti-suffrage petition. Nothing will ever teach men to appreciate women till women practically assert themselves."

Campbell: "That sounds very much like another quotation, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "And they must expect to be treated

as cowards till they show themselves heroes. And they must first of all have the ballot."

Campbell: "Oh!"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes. Then, and not till then, men will acknowledge their equality in all that is admirable in both. Then there will be no more puling insolence about moral courage and vital emergencies to evoke it."

Campbell: "I don't see the steps to this conclusion, but the master-mind of Mrs. J. Plunkett Harmon reaches conclusions at a bound."

Mrs. Somers: "It *wasn't* Mrs. Harmon."

Campbell: "Oh, well, Rev. Lily Barber, then. You needn't tell me *you* originated that stuff, Amy. But I submit for the present. Think it over, my dear, and when I come back to-morrow—"

Mrs. Somers: "Perhaps you had better not come back to-morrow."

Campbell: "Why?"

Mrs. Somers: "Because—because I'm afraid we are not in sympathy. Because if you thought that I needed some vital emergency to make me show that I was ready to die for you any moment—"

Campbell: "*Die* for me? I want you to live for me, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "—and the emergency never came, you would despise me."

Campbell: "Never!"

Mrs. Somers: "If you have such a low opinion of women generally—"

Campbell: "*I* a low opinion of women!"

Mrs. Somers: "You said they were cowards."

Campbell: "I didn't say they were cowards. And if I seemed to say so, it was my misfortune. I honestly and truly think, Amy, that when a woman is roused she isn't afraid of anything in heaven or on—"

He stops abruptly, and looks toward the corner of the room.

Mrs. Somers: "What is it?"

Campbell: "Oh, nothing. I thought I saw a mouse."

Mrs. Somers: "A mouse!" She flings herself upon him and clutches him with convulsive energy. Then suddenly freeing him, she leaps upon a chair and stoops over to hold her train from the floor. "Oh, drive it out, drive it *out!* Don't *kill* it. Oh—e-e-e-e! *Drive* it out! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, Willis, love, jump on a chair! Oh, horrid little dreadful reptile! Oh, *drive* it out!" In uttering these appeals Mrs. Somers alternately looses her hold upon her train in order to clasp her face in her hands, and then uncovers her face to seize her train. "Oh, is it *gone?* Come here, Willis, and let me hold your hand! Or no! Drive it, drive it, *drive* it out!"

Campbell, going about the room in deliberate examination: "*I* can't find it. I guess it's gone into its hole again."

Mrs. Somers: "No, it hasn't! It hasn't got any hole here. It must have come in from somewhere else. Oh, I *hope* I shall have a little wisdom *some* time, and never, never, never have cake and wine brought into the drawing-room again, no matter *how* faint with walking any one is. Of course it was the smell of the fruit and crumbs attracted it; and they might just as well take the horse-cars; but they said they had walked all the way to get me to sign the suffrage petition, and when I said I'd signed the anti-suffrage, of course I had to offer them something; I couldn't do less. Have you driven it out?"

Campbell: "I've done my best. But I can't find it, and I can't drive it out till I *do* find it."

Mrs. Somers: "It's run into the fireplace. Rattle the tongs!" Campbell goes to the fireplace and rattles the tongs against the shovel, Mrs. Somers meanwhile covering her face. "Ow—ugh—e-e-e-e! Is it gone?" She uncovers her eyes.

Campbell: "It never was there."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, it was, Willis. Don't tell me it wasn't! Where else was it if it wasn't there? Look under that book-table!"

Campbell: "Which one?"

Mrs. Somers: "That one with the shelf coming down almost to the carpet. Poke under it with the poker!" As Campbell obeys she again hides her face. "U-u-u-gh! Is it gone *now?*"

Campbell: "It wasn't there."

Mrs. Somers: "Poke hard! Bang against the mop-board! Bang!"

Campbell, poking and banging: "There! I tell you it never was there."

Mrs. Somers, uncovering her face: "Oh, what shall I do? It must be somewhere in the room, and I never can breathe till you've found it. Bang again!"

Campbell: "Nonsense! It's gone long ago. Do you suppose a mouse of any presence of mind or self-respect would stay here after all this uproar?" He restores the tongs to their stand with a clash.

Mrs. Somers, responsive to the clash: "Ow!"

Campbell, advancing toward her and extending his hand: "Come, Amy; get down now. I must be going."

Mrs. Somers, in horror: "Get down? Going?"

Campbell: "Certainly. I can't stay here all day. I've got to follow that mouse out into the street and have him arrested. It's a public duty."

Mrs. Somers: "Don't throw ridicule on it!" After a moment: "You know I can't let you go till I've seen

that mouse leave this room. Go all round and stamp in the corners." She covers her face again. "Ugh!"

Campbell: "How are you going to see him leave the room if you won't look? He's left long ago. *I* wouldn't stay if I was a mouse. And I've got to go, anyway."

Mrs. Somers, uncovering her face: "No! I beg, I *command* you to stay, or I shall never get out of this room alive. You *know* I sha'n't." A ring at the street door is heard. "Oh *dear,* what shall I do? I've told Jane I would see anybody that called, and now I daren't step my foot to the floor! What *shall* I do?"

Campbell, with authority: "You must get down. There's no mouse here, I tell you; and if people come and find you standing on a chair in your drawing-room, what will they think?"

Mrs. Somers: "I can kneel on it." She drops to her knees on the chair. "There!"

Campbell: "That's no better. It's worse."

Mrs. Somers, listening to the party at the door below, which the maid has opened: "'Sh! I want to make out who it is. 'Sh! Yes—it is!" After listening: "Yes; it's Mrs. Miller and Lou Bemis and Mrs. Curwen! I don't see how they happen to come together, for Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Curwen perfectly hate each other. Oh yes! I know! They're all on the way to Mrs. Ransom's reception; he's showing his pictures and some of her things—horrid daubs; I don't see how she can have the face—and they've met here by accident. 'Sh! She's showing them into the reception-room. Yes, that's quite right." Mrs. Somers delivers these sentences in a piercing whisper of extreme volubility. "Now, as soon as she brings up their cards, I'll say I'm not at all well—that I'm engaged—just going out. No, that won't do. I *must* be sick. Anything else would be perfectly insulting after saying that I was at

home; and Jane has got to go back and tell them she forgot that I had gone to bed with a severe headache." As Jane appears at the drawing-room door, and falters at sight of Mrs. Somers kneeling on her chair, that lady beckons her to her, frowning, shaking her head, and pressing her finger on her lip to enforce silence, and takes the cards from her, while she continues in whisper: "Yes. All right, Jane! Go straight back and tell them you forgot I had gone to bed with a perfectly blinding headache; and don't let another soul into the house. Mr. Campbell saw a mouse, and I can't get down till he's caught it. Go!"

II

JANE; MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL; THEN MRS. MILLER; MRS. CURWEN; MRS. BEMIS

Jane, after a moment of petrification: "A mouse! In the room here? Oh, my goodness gracious me!" She leaps upon the chair next to Mrs. Somers, who again springs to her feet.

Mrs. Somers: "Did you *see* it? Oh, e-e-e-e!"

Jane: "W-o-o-o-o! I don't know! Where was it? Oh yes, I thought—" They clutch each other convulsively and blend their cries, at the sound of which the ladies in the reception-room below come flocking upstairs into the drawing-room.

The Ladies, at sight of Mrs. Somers and her servant: "What is it? What is it?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, there's a *mouse* in the room. Oh, jump on chairs!"

Mrs. Miller, vaulting into the middle of the sofa: "A mouse!"

Mrs. Lou Bemis, alighting upon a slight reception-chair: "Oh, not in *this* room, Mrs. Somers! *Don't* say it!"

Mrs. Curwen, with a laugh of mingled terror and enjoyment from the top of the table where she finds herself: "Where is it?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. I didn't see it. But, oh; it's here somewhere. Mr. Campbell saw it, and Jane did when she came up with your cards, and he's

been trying to drive it out, but he can't even *budge* it; and—"

Campbell, desperately: "Ladies, there isn't any mouse here! I've been racketing round here with the shovel and tongs all over the room, and the mouse is gone. You can depend upon that. You're as safe here as you would be in your own rooms."

Mrs. Somers: "How can you say such a thing? No, I won't be responsible if anything happens. The mouse is in this room. No one has seen it go out, and it's here still."

Mrs. Bemis, balancing herself with difficulty on her chair: "Oh dear! how tippy it is! I'm sure it's going to break."

Mrs. Curwen: "Get up here with me, Mrs. Bemis. We can protect each other."

Mrs. Miller: "You would both fall off. Better come here on the sofa, Mrs. Bemis."

Mrs. Curwen: "The mouse could run up that ottoman sofa as easily as the ground."

Mrs. Miller, covering her face: "Oh, how can you say such a thing?"

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, I know I'm going to fall!"

Mrs. Somers: "Willis, for shame! Help her!"

Campbell: "But how—how can I help—"

Mrs. Somers: "Get her another chair."

Campbell: "Oh!" He pushes a large arm-chair toward Mrs. Bemis, who leaps into it with a wild cry, spurning the reception-chair half across the room in her flight.

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr. Campbell! Oh, I shall always bless you!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes, you have saved all our lives. Where there's a man, I don't care for a thousand mice."

Mrs. Miller: "Oh, how very frank!"

"WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes, I'm nothing if not open-minded."

Campbell, surveying her with amusement and interest: "I don't believe you're very much scared."

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh yes, she is, Mr. Campbell. She keeps up that way, and then the first thing she faints."

Mrs. Curwen: "Not on centre-tables, my dear; there isn't room."

Campbell, with increasing fascination: "Why don't you get down and set the rest an example of courage."

Mrs. Curwen: "I prefer to set the example here; it's safer."

Campbell: "You look like the statue of some goddess on her altar—or saint—"

Mrs. Curwen: "Thank you. If you will say victim I will agree with you. Say Iphigenia. But the others are too much. I draw the line at goddesses and saints."

Campbell: "And *you're* afraid of mice, too?"

Mrs. Curwen: "To be sure I am."

Campbell: "Well, there is no mouse down here—nothing but a miserable man. Now, will you get down?"

Mrs. Somers: "Mrs. Curwen, don't think of it! He's just *saying* it. The mouse *is* there." To Campbell: "You are placing us all in a very ridiculous position."

Campbell: "I am sorry for that; I am, indeed. I give you my word of honor that I don't believe there's any mouse in the room."

Mrs. Somers: "Jane just saw it."

Campbell: "She *thought* she saw it, but I don't think she did. A lion would have been scared out by this time." A ring at the door is heard.

Mrs. Somers: "There, Jane, there's some one ringing! You must go to the door."

Jane, throwing her apron over her head: "Oh, please, Mrs. Somers, I can't go! I'm so afraid of mice!"

Mrs. Somers: "Nonsense! You *must* go. It's perfectly ridiculous your pretending not."

Jane: "Oh, I couldn't, Mrs. Somers! I was always so from a child. I can't bear 'em."

Mrs. Somers: "This is disgraceful. Do you mean to say that you won't do what I ask you? Very well, then; you can *go!* You needn't stay the week out; I will pay you, and you can go at once. Do you understand?"

Jane: "Yes, I do, and I'd be glad to go this very minute, but I don't dare to get down."

Mrs. Somers: "But why shouldn't you get down? There isn't the least danger. Is there any danger now, Mr. Campbell?"

Campbell: "Not the least in the world. Mouse gone long ago."

Mrs. Somers: "There!"

Jane: "I can't help it. There are so many in the dining-room—"

Mrs. Somers: "In *my* dining-room? Oh, my goodness! Why didn't you tell me before?"

Jane: "And one ran right over my foot."

Mrs. Somers: "Your foot? Oh, I wonder that you live to tell it! Why haven't you put traps? Where's the cat?"

Jane: "The cook's spoiled the cat, feeding it so much."

Mrs. Miller: "Yes, that's the worst of cooks: they always spoil cats."

Mrs. Bemis: "They overfeed them."

Mrs. Miller: "And then, of course, the cats are worth nothing as mousers. I had a cat—" The bell sounds again.

Mrs. Somers: "There! Some one *must* go."

Campbell: "Why, *I'll* go to the door."

Mrs. Somers: "And leave *us* here? Never! How can you propose such a thing? If you dare to go I shall die. Don't think of such a thing."

Jane: "The cook will go, if they keep ringing. Oh! ugh! hu, hu! When ever shall I get out of this?"

Mrs. Somers: "Stop crying, Jane! Be calm! You're perfectly safe. You may be glad it's no worse. 'Sh! There's the cook going to the door at last. Who can it be? Listen!"

Jane, clutching Mrs. Somers: "Oh! ugh! Wo-o-o-o!"

All the Ladies: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "What's the *matter,* Jane? Let me go! *What's* the matter?"

Jane: "Oh, I thought I was falling—right down in among it!"

Mrs. Agnes Roberts, calling up from below: "What in the world *is* it, Amy?"

Campbell: "Oh, my prophetic soul, my sister!"

Mrs. Somers, shouting: "Is that you, Agnes? Don't come up! Don't come up, for your *life! Don't* come up, unless you wish to perish instantly. Oh, it's dreadful, your coming now. Keep away! Go right straight out of the house, unless you wish to fling your life away."

The other Ladies: "Don't come! Don't come! Keep away! It will do no good."

III

MRS. ROBERTS AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Roberts, mounting the stairs, as if lured to her doom by an irresistible fascination: "Not come? Keep away? Who's talking? What is it? Oh, *Amy,* what is it?" As she reaches the stair-landing space before the drawing-room and looks in, where Campbell stands in the middle of the floor with his hands in his pockets and despair in his face: "You here, Willis? What are you doing? What is it?" Her eye wanders to the ladies trembling in their several refuges, and a dawning apprehension makes itself seen in her face. "What is— Oh, it is—it isn't—it isn't a—mouse! Oh, *Amy!* Amy! Amy! Oh, how *could* you let me come right into the room with it? Oh, I never can forgive you! I thought it was somebody getting killed. Oh, why didn't you *tell* me it was a mouse?" She alights on the piano-stool, and keeps it from rocking by staying herself with one hand on the piano-top.

Campbell: "Now look here, Agnes—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Hush! Don't speak to me, Willis! You unnatural, cruel, heartless— Why did *you* let me come in? I wonder at you, Willis! If you had been *half* the brother you ought to be— Oh dear, dear! I know how you will go away and laugh now and tell everybody. I suppose you think it corroborates that silly speech of yours before the legislative committee that's wounded all your best friends so, and that I've

been talking myself perfectly dumb defending you about." Mrs. Roberts unconsciously gives a little push for emphasis, and the stool revolves with her. "E-e-e-e! Oh, Amy, how can you have one of these old-fashioned, horrid, whirling things, fit for nothing but boarding-house parlors!"

Mrs. Somers, with just pique: "I'm very sorry you don't like my piano-stool, Agnes. I keep it because it was my poor mother's; but if you'll give me due notice another time I'll try to have a different—"

Mrs. Roberts, bursting into tears: "Oh, don't say another word, Amy dear! I'm so ashamed of myself that I can hardly breathe now!"

Campbell: "And I'm ashamed of you, too, Agnes! Get down off that stool, and behave yourself like a sensible woman." He goes toward her as if to lift her down. "The mouse is gone long ago. And if it was here, it wouldn't bite you."

Mrs. Roberts, repelling him with one hand while she clings insecurely to the piano with the other: "Bite? Do you suppose I care for a mouse's *biting,* Willis? I wouldn't care for the bite of an elephant. It's the *idea.* Can't you understand?"

The other Ladies: "Oh yes, it's the idea."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, I told him in the first place, Agnes, that it was the *idea* of a mouse."

Mrs. Curwen: "It's the innate repugnance."

Campbell: "It's the enmity put between the mouse that tempted Eve and the woman—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't be — sacrilegious, Willis! Don't, for your own sake!"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, it's very easy to make fun of the Bible."

Mrs. Roberts: "Or woman. And the wit is equally contemptible in either case."

Mrs. Miller: "Other animals feel about mice just as we do. I was reading only the other day of an elephant—your mentioning an elephant reminded me of it, Mrs.—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh!"

The other Ladies: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "What is it?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Nothing. I thought I was going to fall. Go on, Mrs. Miller."

Mrs. Miller: "Oh, it's merely that the elephant was asleep, and a mouse ran up its trunk—"

All the Ladies: "Horrors!"

Mrs. Miller: "And the poor creature sprang up in the greatest alarm, and bellowed till it woke the whole menagerie. It simply shows that it isn't because women are nervously constituted that they're afraid of mice, for the nervous organism of an elephant—"

Mrs. Somers: "The first time I went to Europe I found a mouse in one of *my* trunks. It was a steamer trunk that you push under the berth, and I've perfectly loathed them ever since."

Mrs. Bemis: "Once in a farm-house, where we were staying the summer, a mouse ran right across the table."

All the Ladies: "Oh!"

Mrs. Curwen: "One morning I found one in the bath-tub."

All the Ladies: "*Oh,* Mrs. Curwen!"

Mrs. Curwen: "We'd heard it scrambling round all night. It was stone-dead."

All the Ladies: "Hideous!"

Campbell: "Why, bless my soul, if the mouse was dead—"

Mrs. Somers: "Then it was ten times as bad as if it was alive. Can't you understand? It's the *idea.* But, oh, don't let's talk of it any more, ladies! Let's

talk of something else. Agnes, are you going to Mrs. Ransom's?"

Mrs. Roberts: "I've been. Nearly everybody's coming away."

Mrs. Miller: "Why, what time is it, Mrs. Somers?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know."

Campbell, looking at his watch: "It's ten minutes of six, and I've missed my appointment."

Mrs. Curwen: "And if we don't go now we shall miss the reception."

Mrs. Bemis: "Papa was very particular I should go, because he couldn't."

Mrs. Miller: "We must go at once."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, I'm so sorry! Jane, go down with the ladies."

Jane: "Oh, *please,* Mrs. Somers!"

Mrs. Miller: "But how are we to go? We are imprisoned here. We cannot get away. You must do something."

Mrs. Curwen: "It is your house, Mrs. Somers. You are responsible."

Mrs. Somers: "But what can I do? I can't get down myself. And if I did, what good would it do?"

Mrs. Roberts: "For shame, Willis, to laugh!"

Campbell: "I wasn't laughing. I was merely smiling aloud."

Mrs. Roberts: "It's the same thing. You ought to think of something."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh yes, do, Willis. Think of something for my—for goodness' sake, and I will always thank you. You're so ingenious."

Campbell: "Well, in the first place, I don't believe there's any mouse in the room."

Mrs. Somers: "That is nonsense; Jane saw it. Is that all your ingenuity amounts to?"

Mrs. Roberts, electrically: "Amy, *I* have an idea!"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, Agnes! How *like* you!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Not at all. It's the simplest thing in the world. It's the only way. And no thanks to Willis, either."

All the Ladies: "Well? Well? Well?"

Mrs. Roberts: "It's just this: all make a rush, one after another, and the rest scream. And Willis must keep beating the floor."

Mrs. Somers: "How perfectly magnificent! Well, Agnes, you *have* got your wits about you! It is the very thing! Now, Mrs. Curwen, if you will jump down and make a rush—"

Mrs. Curwen: "It's for you to make the rush first, Mrs. Somers. You are the hostess."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, but I'm not going, don't you see? I've sent my card to Mrs. Ransom."

Mrs. Curwen: "Then, Mrs. Miller, will you, please—"

Mrs. Miller: "Mrs. Bemis is nearest the door. I think she will wish to start first."

Mrs. Bemis: "No; I will wait for the rest."

Mrs. Somers: "That is a good idea. They ought to all rush together, not one after another. Don't you think so, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, that was what I meant. And we ought to all scream just before they start, so as to scare it."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, how capital! You *have* got a brain, Agnes! *Now* I begin to believe we shall live through it. And Mr. Campbell ought to beat the floor first, oughtn't he?"

Campbell: "I haven't got anything to beat it with." He looks about the room. "But I can go down and get my cane."

All: "No!"

Mrs. Somers: "Jane will go down and get it for you."

Jane: "Oh, I couldn't, Mrs. Somers!"

Campbell: "Perhaps the poker—but it would spoil your carpet."

Mrs. Somers: "No matter for the carpet; you can beat it into—pulp." Campbell gets the poker and beats the carpet in different places. "Harder! Beat harder!"

Mrs. Roberts: "You're not beating at all, Willis. You're just — temporizing." Campbell wildly thrashes the carpet.

Mrs. Somers: "There! That is something like. Now scream, Agnes! Scream, Mrs. Curwen! Mrs. Miller, Lou, scream, please!"

All: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "But nobody started!"

Mrs. Curwen: "I didn't believe the rest would start, and so *I* didn't."

Mrs. Miller: "I was sure no one else would start."

Mrs. Bemis: "So was I."

Mrs. Roberts: "We must have faith in one another, or else the plan's a failure. Now all scream!" They scream.

Mrs. Somers: "E-e-e-e! Keep beating the carpet, Willis! Hard, hard, hard!" The other ladies all leap down from their perches, and rush screaming out of the drawing-room, followed by Jane, with a whoop that prolongs itself into the depths of the basement, after the retreating wails and hysterical laughter of the ladies have died out of the street door. "Oh, wasn't it splendid! It was a perfect success!"

IV

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

Campbell, leaning on his poker and panting with exhaustion: "They got out alive."

Mrs. Somers: "And it was all Agnes' idea. Why, Agnes is gone, too!"

Campbell: "Yes, Agnes is gone. I think it was a ruse of hers to save her own life. She's quite capable of it."

Mrs. Somers, with justice: "No, I don't think that. She was just carried away by the excitement of the moment."

Campbell: "At any rate, she's gone. And now, Amy, don't you think you'd better get down?"

Mrs. Somers, in astonishment: "Get *down?* Why, you must be crazy. How can I get down if it's still there?"

Campbell: "What?"

Mrs. Somers: "The mouse."

Campbell: "But it *isn't* there, my dear. You saw for yourself that it wasn't there."

Mrs. Somers: "Did you see it run out?"

Campbell: "No; but—"

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then, it's there still. Of course it is. I wouldn't get down for worlds."

Campbell: "Oh, good Heavens! Do you expect to spend the rest of your life up there in that chair?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. I shall not get down till I see that mouse leave this room."

Campbell, desperately: "Well, then, I must make a clean breast of it. There never was any mouse here."

Mrs. Somers: "What do you mean?"

Campbell: "I mean that when we were talking—arguing — about the physical courage of women, I thought I would try a mouse. It's succeeded only too well. I'll never try another."

Mrs. Somers: "And could you really be guilty of such a cruel—"

Campbell: "Yes."

Mrs. Somers: "Shameless—"

Campbell: "I was."

Mrs. Somers: "Despicable deception?"

Campbell: "It was vile, I know, but I did it."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't believe it. No, rather than believe that of *you,* Willis, I would believe there were a million mice in the room."

Campbell: "Amy, indeed—"

Mrs. Somers: "No; if you could deceive me then, you can deceive me now. If you could say there was a mouse in the room when there wasn't, you are quite capable of saying there isn't when there is. You are just saying it now to get me to get down."

Campbell: "Upon my honor, I'm not."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, don't talk to me of honor! The honor of a man who could revel—yes, *revel*—in the terrors of helpless women—"

Campbell: "No, no; I'd no idea of it, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "You will please not address me in that way, Mr. Campbell. You have forfeited all right to do so."

Campbell: "I know it. What I did was very foolish and thoughtless."

Mrs. Somers: "It was very low and ungentlemanly. I suppose you will go away and laugh over it with your —associates."

Campbell: "Why not say my ruffianly accomplices at once, Amy? No, I assure you that unless you tell of the affair, nobody shall ever hear of it from me. It's too disastrous a victory. I'm hoist by my own petard, caught in my own mouse-trap. There is such a thing as succeeding too well."

Mrs. Somers: "I should *think* you would be ashamed of it. Suppose you *have* shown that women are nervous and excitable, does that prove anything?"

Campbell: "Nothing in the world."

Mrs. Somers: "Very likely some of us will be sick from it. I dare say you think that would be another triumphant argument."

Campbell: "I shouldn't exult in it."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know when I shall ever get over it myself. I have had a dreadful shock."

Campbell: "I'm sorry with all my heart—I am, indeed. I had no conception that you cared so much for mice—despised them so much."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh yes, laugh, do! It's quite in character. But if you have such a contempt for women, of course you wouldn't want to *marry* one."

Campbell: "Yes, I should, my dear. But *only* one."

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then! You can find some *other* one. All is over between *us*. Yes! I will send you back the precious gifts you have lavished upon me, and I will thank you for mine. A man who can turn the sex that his mother and sister belong to into ridicule can have no real love for his wife. I am glad that I found you out in time."

Campbell: "Do you really mean it, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, I mean it. And I hope it will be a lesson to you. If you find any other poor, silly, trusting creature that you can impose yourself upon for a gentleman as you have upon me, I advise you to reserve your low, vulgar, boyish tricks till after she is helplessly yours, or she may tear your hateful ring from her finger and fling it—" She attempts to pull a ring from her finger, but it will not come off. "Never mind! I will get it off with a little soap-suds; and then—"

Campbell: "Oh no, my dear! Come, I can allow for your excitement, but I can't stand everything, though I admit everything. When a man has said he's played a silly part he doesn't like to be told so, and as for imposing myself upon you for a gentleman—you must take that back, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "I do. I take it back. There hasn't been any imposture. I *knew* you were not a gentleman."

Campbell: "Very good! Then I'm not fit for a lady's company, and I don't deny, though you're so hard upon me, that you're a lady, Amy. Good-bye." He bows, and walks out of the room.

Mrs. Somers, sending her voice after him in a wail of despair: "Willis!"

Campbell, coming back: "Well?"

Mrs. Somers: "I can't let you go." He runs toward her, but she shrinks back on her chair against the wall. "No, no!"

Campbell, hesitating: "Why did you call me back, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "I—I didn't call you back; I just said—Willis."

Campbell: "This is unworthy—even of *you.*"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh!"

Campbell: "Do you admit that you have been too severe?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. What did I say?"

Campbell: "A number of pleasant things: that I was a fraud, and no gentleman."

Mrs. Somers: "Did I say that?"

Campbell: "Yes, you did."

Mrs. Somers: "I must have been very much incensed against you. I beg your pardon for—being so angry."

Campbell: "That won't do. I don't care how angry you are if you don't call me names. You must take them back."

Mrs. Somers: "Do you see my handkerchief anywhere about on the carpet?"

Campbell, looking about, and then finding it: "Yes; here it is." He hands it to her, and she bends forward and takes it from him at arm's-length, whipping it nervously out of his hand. "What's the matter?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, nothing — nothing! Will you please give me my fan from the table there?" He obeys, and she catches it from him as she has caught the handkerchief. "Thank you! Keep away, please!"

Campbell, angrily: "Really, this is too much. If you are afraid of touching me—"

Mrs. Somers: "No, I don't mind touching you; that isn't it. But if you stood so near, don't you see, it might run up *you* and jump on to *me*."

Campbell: "What might?"

Mrs. Somers: "You know. The mouse."

Campbell: "The mouse! There *is* no mouse."

Mrs. Somers: "That's what you said before."

Campbell: "Well, it's true. There isn't any mouse, and there never was."

Mrs. Somers: "There's the idea. And that's all I ever cared for."

Campbell: "Well, what are you going to do? I can't kill the idea of a mouse, and I can't drive it out of the room."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know what I'm going to do. I suppose I shall die here." She presses her handkerchief to her eyes. "I shall never get out of the room alive. Then I hope you will be satisfied."

Campbell: "Amy, how can you say such things to me?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, I suppose you're tired of me in your contemptuous way. I never denied that. And I'm sorry, I'm sure, if I wounded your feelings by anything I said."

Campbell: "Then you admit that I am a gentleman?"

Mrs. Somers: "I didn't say that."

Campbell: "And I can't be satisfied with less. I'll own that I've been stupid, but I haven't been ungentlemanly. I can't remain unless you do."

Mrs. Somers: "And do you think threatening me is gentlemanly?"

Campbell: "That isn't the question. Do you think I'm a gentleman?"

Mrs. Somers: "You're what the world calls a gentleman—yes."

Campbell: "Do you think I'm one?"

Mrs. Somers: "How can I tell? I can't think at all, perched up here."

Campbell: "Why don't you get down, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "You know very well why."

Campbell: "But you'll have to get down some time. You can't stay there always."

Mrs. Somers: "Why should you care?"

Campbell: "You know I do care. You know that I love you dearly, and that I can't bear to see you in distress. Shall I beat the carpet, and you scream and make a rush?"

Mrs. Somers: "No; I haven't the strength for that. I should drop in a faint as soon as I touched the floor."

Campbell: "Oh, good Heavens! What am I going to do, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. You got me into the trouble. I should think you could get me out of it."

Campbell, after walking distractedly up and down the room: "There's only one way that I can think of, and if we're not engaged any longer it wouldn't do."

Mrs. Somers, yielding to her curiosity, after a moment's hesitation: "What is it?"

Campbell: "Oh, unless we're still engaged, it's no use proposing it."

Mrs. Somers: "Can't you tell me without?"

Campbell: "Impossible."

Mrs. Somers, looking down at her fan: "Well, suppose we are still engaged, then?" Looking up: "Yes, say we *are* engaged."

Campbell: "It's to carry you out."

Mrs. Somers, recoiling a little: "Oh! Do you think that would be very nice?"

Campbell: "Yes, I think it would. We can both scream, you know."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes?"

Campbell: "And then you fling yourself into my arms."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes?"

Campbell: "And I rush out of the room with you."

Mrs. Somers, with a deep breath: "I would never do it in the world."

Campbell: "Well, then, you must stay where you are."

Mrs. Somers, closing her fan: "You're not strong enough." She puts her handkerchief into her pocket. "You would be sure to fall." She gathers her train in one hand. "Well, then, look the other way!" Campbell turns his face aside and waits. "No, I can't do it."

Campbell, retiring wrathfully to the other side of the room: "What shall we do, then?"

Mrs. Somers, after reflection: "I don't know what we shall do. But if I were a man—"

Campbell: "Well, if you were a man—"

Mrs. Somers: "Don't you think Mrs. Curwen is fascinating?"

Campbell: "*She* does."

Mrs. Somers: "You must admit she's clever? And awfully stylish?"

Campbell: "I don't admit anything of the kind. She's always posing. I think she made herself ridiculous standing there on the table."

Mrs. Somers, fondly: "Oh, do you think so? You are very severe."

Campbell: "Come, now, Amy, what has all this got to do with it?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nothing. But if I were a man—"

Campbell: "Well?"

Mrs. Somers: "Well, in the first place, I wouldn't have got you wrought up so."

Campbell: "Well, but if you had! Suppose you had done all that I've done, and that I was up there in your place standing on a chair and wouldn't let you leave the room, and wouldn't get down and walk out, and wouldn't allow myself to be carried, what should you do?"

Mrs. Somers, who has been regarding him attentively over the top of her fan, which she holds pressed against her face: "Why, I suppose if you wouldn't let me help you willingly—*I should use violence.*"

Campbell: "You witch!" As he makes a wild rush upon her, the curtain, which in the plays of this author has a strict regard for the *convenances,* abruptly descends.

A LIKELY STORY

A LIKELY STORY

I

MR. AND MRS. WILLIS CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell: "Now this, I think, is the most exciting part of the whole affair, and the pleasantest." She is seated at breakfast in her cottage at Summering-by-the-Sea. A heap of letters of various stylish shapes, colors, and superscriptions lies beside her plate, and irregularly straggles about among the coffee-service. Vis-à-vis with her sits Mr. Campbell behind a newspaper. "How prompt they are! Why, I didn't expect to get half so many answers yet. But that shows that where people have nothing to do *but* attend to their social duties they are always prompt—even the men; women, of course, reply early, anyway, and you don't really care for them; but in town the men seem to put it off till the very last moment, and then some of them call when it's over to excuse themselves for not having come after accepting. It really makes you wish for a leisure class. It's only the drive and hurry of American life that makes our men seem wanting in the convenances; and if they had the time, with their instinctive delicacy, they would be perfect: it would come from the heart: they're more truly polite now. Willis, just *look* at this!"

Campbell, behind his paper: "Look at what?"

Mrs. Campbell: "These replies. Why, I do believe that more than half the people have answered already, and the invitations only went out yesterday. That comes from putting on R. S. V. P. I knew I was right, and I shall always do it; I don't care what *you* say."

Campbell: "You didn't put on R. S. V. P. after all I said?" He looks round the edge of his paper at her.

Mrs. Campbell: "*Yes,* I did. The idea of your setting up for an authority in such a thing as that!"

Campbell: "Then I'm sorry I didn't ask you to do it. It's a shame to make people say whether they'll come to a garden-party from four till seven or not."

Mrs. Campbell: "A shame? How can you provide if you don't know how many are coming? I should like to know that. But of course I couldn't expect you to give in gracefully."

Campbell: "I should give in gracefully if I gave in at all, but I don't." He throws his paper down beside his chair. "Here, hand over the letters, and I'll be opening them for you while you pour out the coffee."

Mrs. Campbell, covering the letters with her hands: "Indeed you won't!"

Campbell: "Well, pour out the coffee, then, anyway."

Mrs. Campbell, after a moment's reflections: "No, I shall not do it. I'm going to open them, every one, before you get a drop of coffee—just to punish you."

Campbell: "To punish me? For what?" Mrs. Campbell hesitates, as if at a loss what to say. "There! you don't know."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, I do: for saying I oughtn't to have put on R. S. V. P. Do you take it back?"

Campbell: "How can I till I've had some coffee?

"THE MOST EXCITING PART."

My mind won't work on an empty stomach. Well—" He rises and goes round the table toward her.

Mrs. Campbell, spreading both arms over the letters: "Willis, if you dare to touch them, I'll ring for Jane, and then she'll see you cutting up."

Campbell: "Touch what? I'm coming to get some coffee."

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, I'll give you some coffee; but don't you touch a single one of those letters—after what you've said."

Campbell: "All right!" He extends one hand for the coffee, and with the other sweeps all the letters together and starts back to his place. As she flies upon him, "Look out, Amy; you'll make me spill this coffee all over the table-cloth."

Mrs. Campbell, sinking into her seat: "Oh, Willis, how can you be so base? *Give* me my letters. *Do!*"

Campbell, sorting them over: "You may have half."

Mrs. Campbell: "No; I shall have all. I insist upon it."

Campbell: "Well, then, you may have all the ladies' letters. There are twice as many of them."

Mrs. Campbell: "No; I shall have the men's, too. Give me the men's first."

Campbell: "How can I tell which are the men's without opening them?"

Mrs. Campbell: "How could you tell which were the ladies'? Come, now, Willis, don't tease me any longer. You know I hate it."

Campbell, studying the superscriptions, one after another: "I want to see if I can guess who wrote them. Don't you like to guess who wrote your letters before you open them?"

Mrs. Campbell, with dignity: "I don't like to guess who wrote other people's letters." She looks down at

the table-cloth with a menace of tears, and Campbell instantly returns all the notes.

Campbell: "There, Amy; you may have them. I don't care who wrote them nor what's in them. And I don't want you to interrupt me with any exclamations over them, if you please." He reaches to the floor for his newspaper, and while he sips his coffee Mrs. Campbell loses no time in opening her letters.

Mrs. Campbell: "I shall do nothing *but* exclaim. The Curwens accept, of course—the very first letter. That means Mrs. Curwen; that is one, at any rate. The New York Addingses do, and the Philadelphia Addingses don't; I hardly expected they would, so soon after their aunt's death, but I thought I ought to ask them. Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, naturally; it was more a joke than anything, sending their invitation. Mrs. and the Misses Carver regret very much; well, *I* don't. Professor and Mrs. Traine are very happy, and so am I; he doesn't go everywhere, and he's awfully nice. Mr. and Mrs. Lou Bemis are very happy, too, and Doctor Lawton is very happy. Mrs. Bridges Dear Mrs. Campbells me, and is very sorry in the first person; she's always nice. Mr. Phillips, Mr. Rangeley, Mr. Small, Mr. Peters, Mr. Staples, Mr. Thornton, *all* accept, and they're all charming young fellows."

Campbell, around his paper: "Well, what of that?"

Mrs. Campbell, with an air of busy preoccupation: "Don't eavesdrop, please; I wasn't talking to you. The Merrills have the pleasure, and the Morgans are sorrow-stricken; the—"

Campbell: "Yes, but why should you care whether those fellows are charming or not? Who's going to marry them?"

Mrs. Campbell: "*I* am. Mrs. Stevenson is bowed

to the earth; Colonel Murphree is overjoyed; the Misses Ja—"

Campbell, putting his paper down: "Look here, Amy. Do you know that you have one little infinitesimal ewe-lamb of a foible? You think too much of young men."

Mrs. Campbell: "*Younger* men, you mean. And *you* have a multitude of perfectly mammoth peccadilloes. You interrupt." She goes on opening and reading her letters. "Well, I didn't expect the Macklines *could;* but everybody seems to be coming."

Campbell: "You pay them too much attention altogether. It spoils them; and one of these days you'll be getting some of them in love with you, and *then* what will you do?"

Mrs. Campbell, with affected distraction: "What *are* you talking about? I'd refer them to you, and you could kill them. I suppose you killed lots of people in California. That's what you always gave me to understand." She goes on with her letters.

Campbell: "I never killed a single human being that I can remember; but there's no telling what I might do if I were provoked. Now, there's that young Welling. He's about here under my feet all the time; and he's got a way lately of coming in through the window from the piazza that's very intimate. He's a nice fellow enough, and sweet, as you say. I suppose he has talent, too, but I never heard that he had set any of the adjacent watercourses on fire; and I don't know that he could give the Apollo Belvedere many points in beauty and beat him."

Mrs. Campbell: "*I* do. Mrs. and Miss Rice accept, and her friend Miss Greenway, who's staying with her, and—yes! here's one from Mr. Welling! *Oh,* how glad I am! Willis, dearest, if I *could* be the means of

bringing those two lovely young creatures together, I should be *so* happy! *Don't* you think, now, he *is* the most delicate-minded, truly refined, exquisitely modest young fellow that ever was?" She presses the unopened note to her corsage, and leans eagerly forward entreating a sympathetic acquiescence.

Campbell: "Well, as far as I can remember my own youth, no. But what does he say?"

Mrs. Campbell, regarding the letter: "I haven't looked yet. He writes the *most* characteristic hand, for a man, that I ever saw. And he has the divinest taste in perfumes! Oh, I wonder what *that* is? Like a memory—a regret." She presses it repeatedly to her pretty nose in the endeavor to ascertain.

Campbell: "Oh, hello!"

Mrs. Campbell, laughing: "Willis, you *are* delightful. I should like to see you really jealous once."

Campbell: "You won't, as long as I know my own incomparable charm. But give me that letter, Amy, if you're not going to open it. I want to see whether Welling is going to come."

Mrs. Campbell, fondly: "Would you *really* like to open it? I've half a mind to let you, just for a reward."

Campbell: "Reward! What for?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, I don't know. Being so nice."

Campbell: "That's something I can't help. It's no merit. Well, hand over the letter."

Mrs. Campbell: "I should have thought you'd insist on *my* opening it, after that."

Campbell: "Why?"

Mrs. Campbell: "To show your confidence."

Campbell: "When I haven't got any?"

Mrs. Campbell, tearing the note open: "Well, it's no use trying any sentiment with you or any generosity,

either. You're always just the same; a teasing joke is your ideal. You can't imagine a woman's wanting to keep up a little romance all through; and a character like Mr. Welling's, who's all chivalry and delicacy and deference, is quite beyond you. That's the reason you're always sneering at him."

Campbell: "I'm not sneering at him, my dear. I'm only afraid Miss Rice isn't good enough for him."

Mrs. Campbell, instantly placated: "Well, she's the only girl who's anywhere *near* it. I don't say she's faultless, but she has a great deal of character, and she's very practical; just the counterpart of his dreaminess; and she *is* very, *very* good-looking, don't you think?"

Campbell: "Her bang isn't so nice as his."

Mrs. Campbell: "No; and aren't his eyes beautiful? And that high, serious look! And his nose and chin are perfectly divine. He looks like a young god!"

Campbell: "I dare say; though I never saw an old one. Well, is he coming? I'm not jealous, but I'm impatient. Read it out loud."

Mrs. Campbell, sinking back in her chair for the more luxurious perusal of the note: "Indeed I shall not." She opens it and runs it hastily through, with various little starts, stares, frowns, smiles of arrested development, laughs, and cries: "Why—why! What does it mean? Is he crazy? Why, there's some mistake. No! It's his hand—and here's his name. I can't make it out." She reads it again and again. "Why, it's perfectly bewildering! Why, there must be some mistake. He couldn't have meant it. Could he have imagined? Could he have dared? There never has been the slightest thing that could be tortured into— But of course not. And Mr. Welling, of all men! Oh, I can't understand it! Oh, Willis, Willis, Willis! What *does*

it mean?" She flings the note wildly across the table, and, catching her handkerchief to her face, falls back into her chair tumultuously sobbing.

Campbell, with the calm of a man accustomed to emotional superabundance, lifting the note from the toast-rack before him: "Well, let's see." He reads aloud: "'Oh, my darling! How can I live till I see you? I will be there long *before* the hour! To think of your *asking* me! You should have said, "I permit you to come," and I would have flown from the ends of the earth. The presence of others will be nothing. It will be sweet to ignore them in my heart, and while I see you moving among them, and looking after their pleasure with that beautiful thoughtfulness of yours, to think, "She is mine, mine, mine!"

> "Oh, young lord lover, what sighs are those
> For one that can never be thine?"

I thank you, and thank you a thousand times over, for this proof of your trust in me, and of your love —*our* love. You shall be the sole keeper of our secret —it is so sweet to think that no one even suspects it!— and it shall live with you, and if you will, it shall die with me. Forever yours, Arthur Welling.'" Campbell turns the note over, and, picking up the envelope, examines the address. "Well, *upon* my word! It's to you, Amy—on the outside, anyway. What do you suppose he means?"

Mrs. Campbell, in her handkerchief: "Oh, I don't know; I *don't* know why he should address such language to me!"

Campbell, recurring to the letter: "*I* never did. *'Oh, my darling—live till I see you—ends of the earth —others will be nothing—beautiful thoughtfulness— mine, mine, mine—our love—sweet to think no one sus-*

pects it—forever yours.' Amy, these are pretty strong expressions to use toward the wife of another, and she a married lady! I think I had better go and solve that little problem of how he can live till he sees you by relieving him of the necessity. It would be disagreeable to him, but perhaps there's a social duty involved."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, Willis, *don't* torment me! What do you suppose it means? Is it some — mistake? It's for somebody else!"

Campbell: "I don't see why he should have addressed it to you, then."

Mrs. Campbell: "But don't you see? He's been writing to some other person at the same time, and he's got the answers mixed—put them in the wrong envelopes. Oh dear! I wonder who she is!"

Campbell, studying her with an air of affected abstraction: "Her curiosity gets the better of her anguish. Look here, Amy! *I* believe you're *afraid* it's to some one else."

Mrs. Campbell: "Willis!"

Campbell: "Yes. And before we proceed any further I must know just what you wrote to this—this Mr. Welling of yours. Did you put on R. S. V. P.?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes; and just a printed card like all the rest. I did want to write him a note in the first person, and urge him to come, because I expected Miss Rice and Miss Greenway to help me receive; but when I found Margaret had promised Mrs. Curwen for the next day, I knew she wouldn't like to take the bloom off that by helping me first; so I didn't."

Campbell: "Didn't what?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Write to him. I just sent a card."

Campbell: "Then these passionate expressions *are* unprovoked, and my duty is clear. I must lose no time

in destroying Mr. Welling. Do you happen to know where I laid my revolver?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, Willis, what are you going to do? You see it's a mistake."

Campbell: "Mr. Welling has got to prove that. I'm not going to have young men addressing my wife as Oh, their darling, without knowing the reason why. It's a liberty."

Mrs. Campbell, inclined to laugh: "Ah, Willis, how funny you are!"

Campbell: "Funny? I'm furious."

Mrs. Campbell: "You know you're not. Give me the letter, dearest. I know it's for Margaret Rice, and I shall see her and just feel round and find out if it isn't so, and—"

Campbell: "What an idea! You haven't the slightest evidence that it's for Miss Rice, or that it isn't intended for you, and it's my duty to find out. And nobody is authority but Mr. Welling. And I'm going to him with the corpus delicti."

Mrs. Campbell: "But how can you? Remember how sensitive, how shrinking he is. Don't, Willis; you mustn't. It will kill him!"

Campbell: "Well, that may save me considerable bother. If he will simply die of himself, I can't ask anything better." He goes on eating his breakfast.

Mrs. Campbell, admiring him across the table: "Oh, Willis, how perfectly delightful you are!"

Campbell: "I know; but why?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Why, taking it in the nice, sensible way you do. Now, some husbands would be so stupid! Of course you *couldn't* think—you couldn't *dream*—that the letter was really for me; and yet you might behave very disagreeably, and make me very unhappy,

if you were not just the lovely, kind-hearted, magnanimous—"

Campbell, looking up from his coffee: "Oh, hello!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes; that is what took my fancy in you, Willis: that generosity, that real gentleness, in spite of the brusque way you have. Refinement of the heart, *I* call it."

Campbell: "Amy, what are you after?"

Mrs. Campbell: "We've been married a whole year now—"

Campbell: "Longer, isn't it?"

Mrs. Campbell: "—and I haven't known you do an unkind thing, a brutal thing."

Campbell: "Well, I understand the banging around hardly ever begins much under two years."

Mrs. Campbell: "How *sweet* you are! And you're *so* funny always!"

Campbell: "Come, come, Amy; get down to business. What is it you do want?"

Mrs. Campbell: "You won't go and tease that poor boy about his letter, will you? Just hand it to him, and say you suppose here is something that has come into your possession by mistake, and that you wish to restore it to him, and then—just run off."

Campbell: "With my parasol in one hand, and my skirts caught up in the other?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, how good! Of course I was imagining how *I* should do it."

Campbell: "Well, a man can't do it that way. He would look silly." He rises from the table, and comes and puts his arm round her shoulders. "But you needn't be afraid of my being rough with him. Of course it's a mistake; but he's a fellow who will enter into the joke, too; he'll enjoy it; he'll—" He merges his sentence in a kiss on her upturned lips, and she

clings to his hand with her right, pressing it fondly to her cheek. "I shall do it in a man's way; but I guess you'll approve of it quite as much."

Mrs. Campbell: "I know I shall. That's what I like about you, Willis: your being so helplessly a man always."

Campbell: "Well, that's what attracted me to you, Amy; your manliness."

Mrs. Campbell: "And I liked your finesse. You are awfully inventive, Willis. Why, Willis, I've just thought of something. Oh, it would be *so* good if you only would!"

Campbell: "Would what?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Invent something now to get us out of the scrape."

Campbell: "What a brilliant idea! *I'm* not in any scrape. And as for Mr. Welling, I don't see how you could help him out unless you sent this letter to Miss Rice, and ask her to send yours back—"

Mrs. Campbell, springing to her feet: "Willis, you are inspired! Oh, how perfectly delightful! And it's so delicate of you to think of that! I will just enclose his note—give it here, Willis—and he need never know that it ever went to the wrong address. Oh, I always felt that you were *truly* refined, anyway." He passively yields the letter, and she whirls away to a writing-desk in the corner of the room. "Now, I'll just keep a copy of the letter—for a joke; I think I've a perfect right to"—scribbling furiously away—"and then I'll match the paper with an envelope—I can do that perfectly—and then I'll just imitate his hand—such fun! —and send it flying over to Margaret Rice. Oh, *how* good! Touch the bell, Willis." And then, as the serving-maid appears: "Yes, Jane! Run right across the lawn to Mrs. Rice's, and give this letter for Miss Mar-

garet, and say it was left here by mistake. Well, it *was,* Willis. Fly, Jane! Oh, Willis love! Isn't it perfect! Of course she'll have got his formal reply to my invitation, and be all mixed up by it, and now when this note comes she'll see through it all in an instant, and it will be such a relief to her; and oh, she'll think that he's directed *both* the letters to her because he couldn't think of any one else! Isn't it lovely? Just like anything that's nice, it's ten times as nice as you expected it to be; and—"

Campbell: "But hold on, Amy!" He lifts a note from the desk. "You've sent your copy. Here's the original now. She'll think you've been playing some joke on her."

Mrs. Campbell, clutching the letter from him and scanning it in a daze: "*What!* Oh, my goodness! It is! I have! Oh, I shall die! Run! Call her back! Shriek, Willis!" They rush to the window together. "No, no! It's too late! She's given it to their man, and now nothing can save me! Oh, Willis! Willis! Willis! This is all your fault, with that fatal suggestion of yours. Oh, if you had only left it to me I never should have got into such a scrape! She will think now that I've been trying to hoax her, and she's perfectly implacable at the least hint of a liberty, and she'll be ready to kill me. I don't know *what* she won't do. Oh, Willis, how *could* you get me into this!"

Campbell, irately: "Get you into this! Now, Amy, this is a little too much. You got yourself into it. You urged me to think of something—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, do, Willis — *do* think of something, or I shall go mad! Help me, Willis! Don't be so heartless—so unfeeling."

Campbell: "There's only one thing now, and that is to make a clean breast of it to Welling and get him to

help us out. A word from him can make everything right, and we can't take a step without him; we can't move!"

Mrs. Campbell: "I can't let you. Oh, isn't it horrible!"

Campbell: "Yes; a nice thing is always ten times nicer than you expected it to be!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, how can you stand there mocking me? Why don't you go to him at once and tell him the whole thing, and beg him, implore him, to help us?"

Campbell: "Why, you just told me I mustn't!"

Mrs. Campbell: "You didn't expect me to say you might, did you? Oh, how cruel!" She whirls out of the room, and Campbell stands in a daze, in which he is finally aware of Mr. Arthur Welling, seen through the open window, on the veranda without. Mr. Welling, with a terrified and furtive air, seems to be fixed to the spot where he stands.

II

MR. WELLING; MR. CAMPBELL

Campbell: "Why, Welling, what the devil are you doing there?"

Welling: "Trying to get away."

Campbell: "To get away? But you sha'n't, man! I won't let you. I was just going to see you. How long have you been there?"

Welling: "I've just come."

Campbell: "What have you heard?"

Welling: "Nothing—nothing. I was knocking on the window-casing to make *you* hear, but you seemed preoccupied."

Campbell: "Preoccupied! convulsed! cataclysmed! Look here: we're in a box, Welling. And you've got us into it." He pulls Welling's note out of his pocket, where he has been keeping his hand on it, and pokes it at him. "Is that yours?"

Welling, examining it with bewilderment mounting into anger: "It's mine; yes. May I ask, Mr. Campbell, how you came to have this letter?"

Campbell: "May I ask, Mr. Welling, how you came to write such a letter to my wife?"

Welling: "To your wife? To Mrs. Campbell? I never wrote any such letter to her."

Campbell: "Then you addressed it to her."

Welling: "Impossible!"

Campbell: "Impossible? I think I can convince

you, much as I regret to do so." He makes search about Mrs. Campbell's letters on the table first, and then on the writing-desk. "We have the envelope. It came among a lot of letters, and there's no mistake about it." He continues to toss the letters about and then desists. "But no matter; I can't find it; Amy's probably carried it off with her. There's no mistake about it. I was going to have some fun with you about it, but now you can have some fun with me. Whom did you send Mrs. Campbell's letter to?"

Welling: "Mrs. Campbell's letter?"

Campbell: "Oh, pshaw! your acceptance or refusal, or whatever it was, of her garden fandango. You got an invitation?"

Welling: "Of course."

Campbell: "And you wrote to accept it or decline it at the same time that you wrote this letter here to some one else. And you addressed two envelopes before you put the notes in either. And then you put them into the wrong envelopes. And you sent this note to my wife and the other note to the other person—"

Welling: "No, I didn't do anything of the kind!" He regards Campbell with amazement, and some apparent doubt of his sanity.

Campbell: "Well, then, Mr. Welling, will you allow me to ask what the deuce you did do?"

Welling: "I never wrote to Mrs. Campbell at all. I thought I would just drop in and tell her why I couldn't come. It seemed so formal to write."

Campbell: "Then will you be kind enough to tell me whom you *did* write to?"

Welling: "No, Mr. Campbell, I can't do that."

Campbell: "You write such a letter as that to my wife, and then won't tell me whom it's to?"

Welling: "No! And you've no right to ask me."

Campbell: "I've no right to ask you?"

Welling: "No. When I tell you that the note wasn't meant for Mrs. Campbell, that's enough."

Campbell: "I'll be judge of that, Mr. Welling. You say that you were not writing two notes at the time, and that you didn't get the envelopes mixed. Then, if the note wasn't meant for my wife, why did you address it to her?"

Welling: "That's what I can't tell; that's what I don't know. It's as great a mystery to me as it is to you. I can only conjecture that when I was writing that address I was thinking of coming to explain to Mrs. Campbell that I was going away to-day, and shouldn't be back till after her party. It was too complicated to put in a note without seeming to give my regrets too much importance. And I suppose that when I was addressing the note that I did write I put Mrs. Campbell's name on because I had her so much in mind."

Campbell, with irony: "Oh!"

III

MRS. CAMPBELL; MR. WELLING; MR. CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell, appearing through the portière that separates the breakfast-room from the parlor beyond: "Yes!" She goes up and gives her hand to Mr. Welling with friendly frankness. "And it was very nice of you to think of me at such a time, when you ought to have been thinking of some one else."

Welling, with great relief and effusion: "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Campbell! I was sure you would understand. You couldn't have imagined me capable of addressing such language to you; of presuming—of—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Of course not! And Willis has quite lost his head. I saw in an instant just how it was. I'm so sorry you can't come to my party—"

Campbell: "Amy, have you been eavesdropping?"

Mrs. Campbell: "There was no need of eavesdropping. I could have heard you out at Loon Rock Light, you yelled so. But as soon as I recognized Mr. Welling's voice I came to the top of the stairs and listened. I was sure you would do something foolish. But now I think we had better make a clean breast of it, and tell Mr. Welling just what we've done. We knew, of course, the letter wasn't for me, and we thought we wouldn't vex you about it, but just send it to the one it *was* meant for. We've surprised your secret, Mr. Welling, though we didn't intend to; but if you'll accept our congratulations—under the rose, of course—

we won't let it go any further. It does seem so perfectly ideal, and I feel like saying, Bless you, my children! You've been in and out here so much this summer, and I feel just like an elder sister to Margaret."

Welling: "Margaret?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, Miss Rice, then—"

Welling: "Miss Rice?"

Mrs. Campbell, with dignity: "Oh, I'm sorry if we seem to presume upon our acquaintance with the matter. We couldn't very well help knowing it under the circumstances."

Welling: "Certainly, certainly—of course: I don't mind that at all: I was going to tell you, anyway: that was partly the reason why I came instead of writing—"

Campbell, in an audible soliloquy: "I supposed he *had* written."

Mrs. Campbell, intensely: "Don't interrupt, Willis! Well?"

Welling: "But I don't see what Miss Rice has to do with it."

Mrs. Campbell: "You don't see! Why, isn't Margaret Rice the one—"

Welling: "What one?"

Mrs. Campbell: "The one that you're engaged—the one that the note was really *for*?"

Welling: "No! What an idea! Miss Rice? Not for an instant! It's—it's her friend—Miss Greenway —who's staying with her—"

Mrs. Campbell, in a very awful voice: "Willis! Get me some water—some wine! Help me! Ah! Don't touch me! It was you, *you* who did it all! Oh, *now* what shall I do?" She drops her head upon Campbell's shoulder, while Welling watches them in stupefaction.

Campbell: "It's about a million times nicer than we could have expected. That's the way with a nice

thing when you get it started. Well, young man, you're done for; and so are we, for that matter. We supposed that note which you addressed to Mrs. Campbell was intended for Miss Rice—"

Welling: "Ho, ho, ho! Ah, ha, ha! Miss Rice? Ha—"

Campbell: "I'm glad you like it. You'll enjoy the rest of it still better. We thought it was for Miss Rice, and my wife neatly imitated your hand on an envelope and sent it over to her just before you came in. Funny, isn't it? Laugh on! Don't mind *us!*"

Welling, aghast: "Thought my note was for Miss Rice? Sent it to her? Gracious powers!" They all stand for a moment in silence, and then Welling glances at the paper in his hand. "But there's some mistake. You haven't sent my note to Miss Rice: here it is now!"

Campbell: "Oh, that's the best of the joke. Mrs. Campbell took a copy"—Mrs. Campbell moans—"she meant to have some fun with you about it, and it's ten times as much fun as *I* expected; and in her hurry she sent off her copy and kept the original. Perhaps that makes it better."

Mrs. Campbell, detaching herself from him and confronting Mr. Welling: "No; worse! She'll think we've been trying to hoax her, and she'll be in a towering rage; and she'll show the note to Miss Greenway, and you'll be ruined. Oh, poor Mr. Welling! Oh, what a fatal, fatal—mix!" She abandons herself in an attitude of extreme desperation upon a chair, while the men stare at her, till Campbell breaks the spell by starting forward and ringing the bell on the table.

Mrs. Campbell: "What are you doing, Willis?"

Campbell: "Ringing for Jane." As Jane appears: "Did you give Miss Rice the note?"

IV

JANE; MRS. CAMPBELL; WELLING; CAMPBELL

Jane: "No, sir; I gave it to the man. He said he would give it to Miss Rice."

Campbell: "Then it's all up. If by any chance she hadn't got it, Amy, you might have sent over for it and said there was a mistake."

Jane: "He said Miss Rice was out driving with Miss Greenway in her phaeton, but they expected her back every minute."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, my goodness! And you didn't come to tell me? Oh, if we had only known! We've lost our only chance, Willis."

Jane: "I did come and knock on your door, ma'am, but I couldn't make you hear."

Campbell: "There's still a chance. Perhaps she hasn't got back yet."

Jane: "I know she ain't, sir. I've been watching for her ever since. I can always see them come, from the pantry window."

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, then, don't stand there talking, but run at once! Oh, Willis! Never tell me again that there's no such thing as an overruling Providence. Oh, what an interposition! Oh, I can never be grateful and humble enough— Goodness me, Jane! Why don't you go?"

Jane: "But where, ma'am? I don't know what you want me to do. I'm willing enough to do anything if

I know what it is, but it's pretty hard to do things if you don't."

Campbell: "You're perfectly right, Jane. Mrs. Campbell wants you to telegraph yourself over to Mrs. Rice, and say to her that the letter you left for Miss Rice is not for her, but another lady, and Mrs. Campbell sent it by mistake. Get it and bring it back here, dead or alive, even if Mrs. Rice has to pass over your mangled body in the attempt."

Jane, tasting the joke, while Mrs. Campbell gasps in ineffective efforts to reinforce her husband's instructions: "I will that, sir."

V

MRS. CAMPBELL; WELLING; CAMPBELL

Campbell: "And now, while we're waiting, let's all join hands and dance round the table. You're saved, Welling. So are you, Amy. And so am I—which is more to the point."

Mrs. Campbell, gayly: "Dansons!" She extends her hands to the gentlemen, and as they circle round the breakfast-table she sings:

"'Sur le pont d'Avignon,
Tout le monde y danse en rond.'

She frees her hands and courtesies to one gentleman and the other.

"'Les belles dames font comme ça;
Les beaux messieurs font comme ça.'"

Then she catches hands with them again, and they circle round the table as before, singing:

"'Sur le pont d'Avignon,
Tout le monde y danse en rond.'

Oh dear! Stop! I'm dizzy—I shall fall." She spins into a chair, while the men continue solemnly circling by themselves.

Campbell: "It is a sacred dance:

"'Sur le pont d'Avignon—'"

Welling: "It's an expiation:

"'Tout le monde y danse en rond.'"

Mrs. Campbell, springing from her chair and running to the window: "Stop, you crazy things! Here comes Jane! Come right in here, Jane! Did you get it? Give it to me, Jane!"

Welling: "I think it belongs to me, Mrs. Campbell."

Campbell: "Jane, I am master of the house—nominally. Give me the letter."

VI

JANE; MRS. CAMPBELL; WELLING; CAMPBELL

Jane, entering, blown and panting, through the open window: "Oh, how I did run—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, yes! But the letter—"

Welling: "Did you get it?"

Campbell: "Where is it?"

Jane, fanning herself with her apron: "I can't hardly get my breath—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Had she got back?"

Jane: "No, ma'am."

Campbell: "Did Mrs. Rice object to giving it up?"

Jane: "No, sir."

Welling: "Then it's all right?"

Jane: "No, sir. All wrong."

Welling: "All wrong?"

Campbell: "How all wrong?"

Mrs. Campbell: "What's all wrong, Jane?"

Jane: "Please, ma'am, may I have a drink of water? I'm so dry I can't speak."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, certainly."

Campbell: "Of course."

Welling: "Here." They all pour glasses of water and press them to her lips.

Jane, pushing the glasses away and escaping from the room: "They thought Mrs. Campbell was in a great hurry for Miss Rice to have the letter, and they sent off the man with it to meet her."

VII

MRS. CAMPBELL; WELLING; CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, merciful goodness!"

Welling: "Gracious powers!"

Campbell: "Another overruling Providence. Now you *are* in for it, my boy! So is Amy. And so am I —which is still more to the point."

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, now, what shall we do?"

Campbell: "All that we can do now is to await developments: they'll come fast enough. Miss Rice will open her letter as soon as she gets it, and she won't understand it in the least; how *could* she understand a letter in your handwriting, with Welling's name signed to it? She'll show it to Miss Greenway—"

Welling: "Oh, don't say that!"

Campbell: "—Greenway; and Miss Greenway won't know what to make of it, either. But she's the kind of girl who'll form some lively conjectures when she reads that letter. In the first place, she'll wonder how Mr. Welling happens to be writing to Miss Rice in that affectionate strain—"

Mrs. Campbell, in appealing shriek: "Willis!"

Campbell: "—and she naturally won't believe he's done it. But, then, when Miss Rice tells her it's your handwriting, Amy, she'll think that you and Miss Rice have been having your jokes about Mr. Welling; and she'll wonder what kind of person you are, anyway, to make free with a young man's name that way."

Welling: "Oh, I assure you that she admires Mrs. Campbell more than anybody."

Mrs. Campbell: "Don't try to stop him; he's fiendish when he begins teasing."

Campbell: "Oh, well! If she admires Mrs. Campbell and confides in you, then the whole affair is very simple. All you've got to do is to tell her that after you'd written her the original of that note, your mind was so full of Mrs. Campbell and her garden-party that you naturally addressed it to her. And then Mrs. Campbell can cut in and say that when she got the note she knew it wasn't for her, but she never dreamed of your caring for Miss Greenway, and was so sure it was for Miss Rice that she sent her a copy of it. That will make it all right and perfectly agreeable to every one concerned."

Mrs. Campbell: "And I can say that I sent it at your suggestion, and then, instead of trying to help me out of the awful, awful — box, you took a cruel pleasure in teasing me about it! But I shall not say anything, for I shall not see them. I will leave you to receive them and make the best of it. Don't *try* to stop me, Willis!" She threatens him with her fan as he steps forward to intercept her escape.

Campbell: "No, no! Listen, Amy! You *must* stay and see those ladies. It's all well enough to leave it to me, but what about poor Welling? *He* hasn't done anything—except cause the whole trouble."

Mrs. Campbell: "I am very sorry, but I can't help it. I must go." Campbell continues to prevent her flight, and she suddenly whirls about and makes a dash at the open window. "Oh, very well, then! I can get out this way." At the same moment Miss Rice and Miss Greenway appear before the window on the piazza. "Ugh! E-e-e! How you frightened me! But—but come

in. So gl—glad to see you! And you — you, too, Miss Greenway. Here's Mr. Welling. He's been desolating us with a story about having to be away over my party, and just getting back for Mrs. Curwen's. Isn't it too bad? Can't some of you young ladies—or all of you—make him stay?" As Mrs. Campbell talks on, she readjusts her spirit more and more to the exigency, and subdues her agitation to a surface of the sweetest politeness.

VIII

MISS RICE, MISS GREENWAY, AND THE OTHERS

Miss Rice, entering with an unopened letter in her hand, which she extends to Mrs. Campbell: "What in the world does it all mean, Mrs. Campbell, your sending your letters flying after *me* at this rate?"

Mrs. Campbell, with a gasp: "My letters?" She mechanically receives the extended note and glances at the superscription: "*Mrs. Willis Campbell.* Ah!" She hands it quickly to her husband, who reads the address with a similar cry.

Campbell: "Well, well, Amy! This is a pretty good joke on you. You've sealed up one of your own notes and sent it to Miss Rice. Capital! Ah, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Campbell, with hysterical rapture: "Oh, how delicious! What a ridiculous blunder! I don't wonder you were puzzled, Margaret."

Welling: "What! Sent her your own letter, addressed to yourself?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes. Isn't it amusing?"

Welling: "The best thing I ever heard of."

Miss Rice: "Yes. And if you only knew what agonies of curiosity Miss Greenway and I had suffered, wanting to open it and read it, anyway, in spite of all the decencies, I think you ought to read it to us."

Campbell: "Or at least give Miss Rice her own letter. What in the world did you do with that?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Put it in my desk, where I thought

I put mine. But never mind it now. I can tell you what was in it just as well. Come in here a moment, Margaret." She leads the way to the parlor, whither Miss Rice follows.

Miss Greenway, pouting: "Oh, mayn't I know, too? I think that's hardly fair, Mrs. Campbell."

Mrs. Campbell: "No; or—Margaret may tell you afterward; or Mr. Welling may, *now!*"

Miss Greenway: "How very formidable!"

Mrs. Campbell, over her shoulder, on going out: "Willis, bring me the refusals and acceptances, won't you? They're up-stairs."

Campbell: "Delighted to be of any service." Behind Miss Greenway's back he dramatizes over her head to Welling his sense of his own escape and his compassion for the fellow-man whom he leaves in the toils of fate.

IX

MISS GREENWAY; MR. WELLING

Welling: "Nelly!" He approaches, and timidly takes her hand.

Miss Greenway: "Arthur! That letter was addressed in your handwriting. Will you please explain?"

Welling: "Why, it's very simple—that is, it's the most difficult thing in the world. Nelly, can you believe *any*thing I say to you?"

Miss Greenway: "What nonsense! Of course I can —if you're not too long about it."

Welling: "Well, then, the letter in that envelope was one I wrote to Mrs. Campbell—or the copy of one."

Miss Greenway: "The copy?"

Welling: "But let me explain. You see, when I got your note asking me to be sure and come to Mrs. Curwen's—"

Miss Greenway: "Yes?"

Welling: "—I had just received an invitation from Mrs. Campbell for her garden-party, and I sat down and wrote to you, and concluded I'd step over and tell her why I couldn't come, and with that in my mind I addressed your letter — the one I'd written you — to her."

Miss Greenway: "With my name inside?"

Welling: "No; I merely called you 'darling'; and when Mrs. Campbell opened it she saw it couldn't be

for her, and she took it into her head it must be for Miss Rice."

Miss Greenway: "For Margaret? What an idea! But why did she put your envelope on it?"

Welling: "She made a copy, for the joke of it, and then, in her hurry, she enclosed that in my envelope, and kept the original and the envelope she'd addressed to Miss Rice, and—and that's all."

Miss Greenway: "What a perfectly delightful muddle! And how shall we get out of it with Margaret?"

Welling: "With Margaret? I don't care for her. It's you that I want to get out of it with. And you do believe me—you do forgive me, Nelly?"

Miss Greenway: "For what?"

Welling: "For—for— I don't know what for. But I thought you'd be so vexed."

Miss Greenway: "I shouldn't have liked you to send a letter addressed 'darling' to Mrs. Curwen; but Mrs. Campbell is different."

Welling: "Oh, how archangelically sensible! How divine of you to take it in just the right way!"

Miss Greenway: "Why, of course! How stupid I should be to take such a thing in the wrong way!"

Welling: "And I'm so glad, now, I didn't try to lie to you about it."

Miss Greenway: "It wouldn't have been of any use. You couldn't have carried off anything of that sort. The truth is bad enough for *you* to carry off. Promise me that you will always leave the other thing to *me*."

Welling: "I will, darling; I will, indeed."

Miss Greenway: "And now we must tell Margaret, of course."

X

MISS RICE; THEN MR. AND MRS. CAMPBELL, AND THE OTHERS

Miss Rice, rushing in upon them and clasping Miss Greenway in a fond embrace: "You needn't. Mrs. Campbell has told me; and oh, Nelly, I'm so happy for you! And isn't it all the greatest mix?"

Campbell, rushing in and wringing Welling's hand: "You needn't tell me, either; I've been listening, and I've heard every word. I congratulate you, my dear boy! I'd no idea she'd let you up so easily. You'll allow yourself it isn't a very likely story."

Welling: "I know it. But—"

Miss Rice: "That's the very reason no one could have made it up."

Miss Greenway: "*He* couldn't have made up even a likely story."

Campbell: "Congratulate you again, Welling. Do you suppose she can keep so always?"

Mrs. Campbell, rushing in with extended hands: "Don't answer the wretch, Mr. Welling. Of course she can, with *you.* Dansons!" She gives a hand to Miss Greenway and Welling each; the others join them, and as they circle round the table she sings:

> "'Sur le pont d'Avignon,
> Tout le monde y danse en rond.'"

THE END